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Gnome

IT IS with great regret that we have to announce the sacking of the editor of the Sunday Gnomegraph, Miss Sandy Shaw, after only 8 weeks.

It quickly became apparent that Miss Shaw, although a highly-talented journalist, was severely lacking in any judgement, which she displayed by agreeing to do exactly what we told her. For example, her decision to obey our orders to "dumb the paper down, change everything and alienate all the existing readers", was a disastrous mistake on her part, which led to a fall in circulation of over 100%. Similar errors, such as our idea for her to introduce a new pink masthead, a 156-page handbag supplement and a new-style magazine called *Bumma*, contributed to her inevitable departure.

In her place, we have appointed Ms "Tootsie" Footsie Wheatgerm who, for the last 40 years, has been Deputy Assistant Finance Editor of the distinguished periodical *The Hedge Funday Times*. We are confident that she will not repeat Ms Shaw's errors of imagining that we have any idea how to run a newspaper.

Signed B. McPad,
pp. The Gnomely Brothers,
The Island of Brilleau,
Nr Sark, Channel Islands.

Number crunchings

£400,000

■ Loan on Tessa Jowell's mortgage, which may have been paid by "Mr B"

£4,000,000

■ Mortgages currently owed by the Blairs

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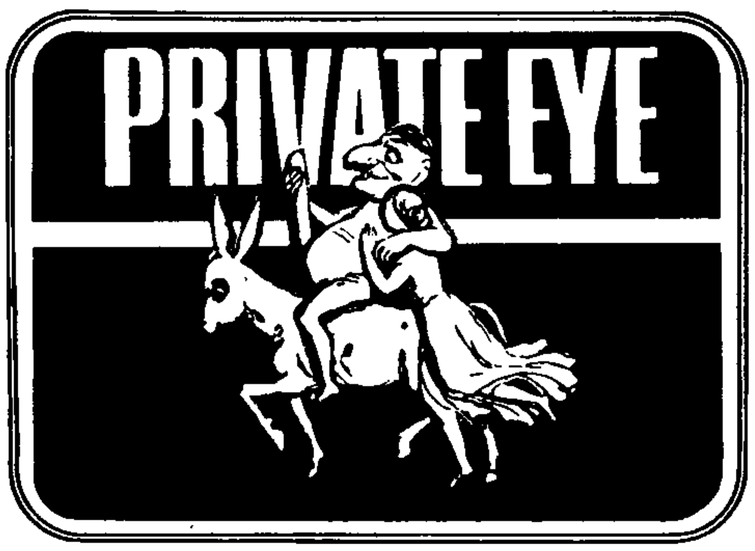

AFTER waiting months for a peerage, Labour donor Dr Chai Patel could bear no more. Magnificent in his injured innocence, he took to the airwaves last week to say how "deeply distressed" he was by the delay. He had even sought a QC's advice as to whether his human rights were being abused by this cruel and unusual honour-deprivation.

Poor diddums! But those who were moved by Dr P's sob story should recall a few facts.

Patel complains that he has endured "years of press leaks and innuendo regarding a situation over which I had no direct control at one of the nursing homes within the company I ran." This was of course Lynde House, in south-west London, which was run by Patel's Westminster Health Care company at a time when frail elderly patients were left for hours sitting in their own waste, suffered preventable falls and "unexplained bruising", and were left unmoved for so long they developed bed sores.

When the *Eye* started highlighting the plight of Lynde House residents in 2002, Patel's then spokesman Jonathan Street insisted that the home had "always been of high quality and subject to very few complaints. This is borne out by the independent inspection reports".

Er, not quite. A year earlier, Westminster Health Care had commissioned a report by independent consultant Suzanne Mowat which was damning. She listed complaints from families and staff about patients stuck in soiled or wet beds, bells not being answered, a lack of adequate care and supervision. "The level of complaints provides evidence of the failure to manage Lynde House effectively," she concluded.

Independent inspector Mary McLaren produced a similarly critical report two years later, in 2003. (Just before it was published, Patel sold Westminster Health Care, including Lynde House, for £288m.) These two documents led to last year's disciplinary hearing against Patel at the General Medical Council on charges of serious professional misconduct.

Patel says he was "cleared" by the GMC. True, but hardly the full story. The hearing proper never took place. After three weeks of legal argument about the wording of charges and the rules of evidence, Patel's lawyers decamped to the high court for a judicial review. The upshot of all this wrangling was that they had the critical inspection reports – on which families of Lynde House inmates had been relying – deemed "hearsay" and therefore inadmissible. The GMC had to abandon the case, formally exonerating Patel without a jot of evidence actually being heard.

Now the selfsame Chai Patel protests to the Lords appointments commission about the traducing of his reputation. And what galls him most? "At no time," he wails, "have I ever had the opportunity to present the evidence from my standpoint." Shome mishtake, shurely?

THE sound of Labour's top fundraiser Lord Levy calling for state funding of political parties is the sound of the bottom of the barrel being scraped.

Now that Chai Patel has said his piece, there's no chance of any big donor getting a peerage in the forseeable future. And without the dimmest prospect of ermine in view, hardly anyone will stay in the queue to give Labour a great wad of cash.

Taxpayer funding, therefore, will not just be a high-minded measure designed to keep politics free of corruption: it will be a vital expedient to keep Labour's faltering finances afloat.

Fee speech for all

■ **Ordure! Ordure! New Commons column** 6
■ **A bloody disgrace: the Hep C whitewash** 10
■ **Aladdin sane? Iranians find a voice** 15
■ **They're back: Books on Jay & Jeff** 24, 25
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■ **Pure Mills & Bung: In the City** 28, 29

IF David Mills' latest explanation for his hedge fund investments is to be believed, he may soon be facing prosecution here as well as in Italy.

Mills wrote his now infamous "Dear Bob" letter to his accountant shortly after learning that he was under investigation by the Inland Revenue in February 2004. The story told in the letter that the £350,000 came his way as a gift from "the B people" three years earlier justified his failure to include the payment in his tax return.

Mills was able to present the omission as based on a legitimate view of uncertain tax law on the question of gifts. He thus escaped any serious punishment and just coughed up some tax while the Revenue put its file away. But if his story was fabricated all along, as he is now insisting to Italian prosecutors, the lawyerly excuse he gave to the taxman for his false return no longer holds.

The Revenue wouldn't normally take kindly to this sort of cover-up. Indeed, HMRC's prosecution policy (and the Inland Revenue's at the time) states that criminal rather than civil proceedings will generally be pursued in any of several circumstances, including "where an individual holds a position of trust or responsibility" [like being a lawyer]; "where materially false statements are made or materially false documents are provided in the course of a civil investigation" [like the letter]; or "where there is a link to suspected wider criminality, whether domestic or international, involving offences not under the administration of HMRC" [hmmm...].

If Mills continues to defend himself in Italy by maintaining he made up the story about the gift from Mr B, the Revenue might reflect on the porkies he told them two years ago and reconsider whether he should still be let off so lightly. The tax inspectors could already be dusting off their old files. If Mills has any complaints, however, he can always have a word with his sister-in-law, Dame Barbara Mills QC, the Revenue Adjudicator.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

To Wives and Housekeepers

It is the fashion now-a-days of many ladies to ignore their husbands' pecuniary affairs; they profess ignorance of money matters, and encourage themselves in the idea that their wishes at least must be gratified – with the rest they have nothing to do. Now the affectation of this is bad enough, but nothing can be worse than the actual practice – many a ruined house, many a bankruptcy and insolvency springs out of it – many a domestic circle is broken up, and the pride which caused the ruin is humbled to dust as a reward...

– Mrs Beeton, Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine 1857

"We're just going to have to learn to take off another jumper, that's all"

ONE of the main conclusions of the National Audit Office report on the MG Rover collapse is that when a major company is on the skids businessmen should be brought in pronto to advise the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

The model recommended by the NAO for this help is the DTI's business support product "selective finance for investment". Previously known as "regional selective assistance", the process has recently been revamped by a consultant called Jonathan Whiticar. By a remarkable coincidence Whiticar, originally a NatWest banker, was director of the DTI's industrial development unit at the time of the Phoenix consortium's doomed £10 acquisition of Rover in 2000 – in which position he was responsible for providing much of the government's financial advice.

What better expertise to call on in times of trouble!

HOW appropriate that Mapeley, the company that does most of its business through secretive tax havens – hotbeds of money laundering, terrorist financing and tax dodging – should win the contract to manage the 70-odd "authentication by interview" centres at which the Passport Service will vet and biometrically test new applicants in the interests of national security.

It's now five years since Mapeley's only other government deal: the infamous STEPS contract under which a Bermudan company bought the Inland Revenue and Customs buildings. Since then payments under the deal have gone well beyond what Mapeley said they would while the company's expanding profits, fed to a new holding company in Guernsey, have made a lie of chief executive Jamie Hopkins' assurances to parliament that for 20 years returns would be marginal (see *Eye* 1150). All the while the contract under which taxpayers' money is poured down the drain remains confidential and Mapeley won't even reveal the directors of the offshore company that owns hundreds of millions of pounds worth of public assets.

So does the new contract rule out yet more tax dodging by Mapeley? Incredibly, given Mapeley's record, the Home Office appears to have ignored Treasury guidance by failing to impose any such condition. For a start, the whole deal is underwritten (presumably for an appropriately hefty fee) by a tax haven company in the shape of Guernsey-registered Mapeley Ltd. What's more, although the passport service will rent the premises from a British company called Mapeley Estates Ltd, there is nothing to stop this company leasing the facilities from an offshore Mapeley company – thus channelling all the income into a tax haven exactly as currently happens under the STEPS deal.

EYE TOLD YOU SO

THE airline industry and Department of Transport at last seem to accept that there is a dangerous problem of toxic fumes escaping into the cockpit and cabins of passenger aircraft – to judge by the *Observer*'s recent coverage anyway.

When six years ago the *Eye* first exposed the dangers of noxious fumes escaping into the cockpits of planes and affecting pilots and passengers alike, particularly in British Aerospace 146s, ministers and the industry were largely in denial. The most the Civil Aviation Authority did at the time was to issue a mandatory air worthiness directive (AD), ordering all such incidents to be recorded and investigated.

The *Observer* has now reported that in the last three years the CAA had recorded more than 100 fume incidents reported under the AD.

6.45 **Antiques Roadshow*** The team visits Montacute House, Somerset, where items valued include original illustrations for Winnie the Poo. 576872

Sunday Times

STREET OF SHAME

ON 26 February, *Sunday Telegraph* editor Sarah Sands printed a full-page story by Andrew Alderson about Prince Charles and his former spin-doctor Mark Bolland. Alderson noted that although Bolland had his admirers, many others (including the Queen) regarded him as "a double-dealing manipulative schemer".

Bolland is, of course, the civil partner of Guy Black, now the Telegraph Group's corporate affairs director. Less than a fortnight later, Sands was sacked.

Quite why Telegraph supremo Murdoch MacLennan needs Black as a full-time PR man is something of a mystery. He already employs the PR services of former *Express* editor Sir Nick Lloyd, who was hard at work spreading pro-MacLennan spin after Sands' dismissal.

But Black may have other duties too. MacLennan is currently chairman of the Newspaper Publishers' Association, which celebrates its centenary in May. A big jamboree is being organised at the British Library, possibly to be attended by HM the Queen. MacLennan is already practising his curtseys, and if Guy Black can smooth things towards a knighthood, the world will be his.

THE sane and reasonable Barclay twins are currently pursuing a criminal libel case against the *Times* in, er, Paris. The defendants are the *Times*, editor Robert Thomson and media editor Dan Sabbagh.

Sabbagh's offending report appeared on 2 November 2004 in the paper's business section, edited by one Patience Wheatcroft. Now that she has been poached by the Barclays' *Sunday Telegraph*, we trust Patience's old colleagues won't be tempted to call her as a witness and ask why she published the article. It would be a disgracefully mischievous gesture, and would cause needless distress and embarrassment to her delightful new employers.

CRYSTAL Palace chairman Simon Jordan gamely used his sports column in the *Observer* on 2 March to attack Fleet Street's carelessness and inaccuracy.

"Just one thing wrong with tabloid stories – the facts," he thundered, adding that sometimes he had to sue when they were really inaccurate.

Oddly enough elsewhere in that day's *Observer* was an apology to former Crystal Palace player Jamie Pollock, who had sued over a claim that he was sacked for being overweight. The *Observer* acknowledged that its story was cobblers and apologised. But it forgot to mention who wrote the original libellous piece.

Step forward… Simon Jordan!

ONLY three months into 2006, there is already a hot favourite for this year's prize for the most spectacularly dud PR puff.

The April issue of *GQ* carries an "article" about the new Wembley stadium which reads more like a publicity brochure for the sports venue and its management company. Hack John Naughton can barely contain his awe and reveals that "the stadium architects employed astronomers to calculate the position of the sun on May afternoons to ensure that the pitch is not covered in shadow when the FA Cup final is played. At 3pm on Cup Final day, only two southern corner flags will be in shadow."

Not that anyone will notice. Just after the mag went to press, it was announced that the stadium wouldn't be ready in time for the FA Cup final, which will now take place in sunny Cardiff instead.

"For you, Tommy, ze mentioning-the-war is over"

THE *Daily Telegraph* has got itself into a right old tangle in its coverage of the "City Slickers" share-ramping scandal.

Last week editor John Bryant spiked his own media columnist Roy Greenslade's lead story, which claimed that the *Daily Mirror* management had made a false statement to the Press Complaints Commission about former *Mirror* editor Piers Morgan's share dealings in the year 2000.

Trinity Mirror, the *Mirror*'s parent company, told the PCC, in a letter from legal director Paul Vickers in late January or February 2000, that Moron admitted buying £20,000-worth of shares in Viglen, the Alan Sugar technology company at the centre of the scandal. But the board of Trinity Mirror, said Greenslade, had known *before* Vickers' letter to the PCC that Moron and wife Marion's stake in Viglen had in fact been more than £67,000. This figure did not become public knowledge for more than five years, when it was revealed at the trial of *Mirror* share tipster James Hipwell last year.

Greenslade gets scoop shock! But Bryant was unimpressed. According to the hacks' trade paper, *Press Gazette* (prop. P. Moron), Bryant was "unhappy" about Greenslade's story. He declined to run it, but told him he could "place it elsewhere". This Greenslade promptly did. It appeared on the Media *Grauniad* website last week, leading on the fact that the PCC was considering reopening its inquiry into the City Slickers episode.

The *Telegraph* was now reduced belatedly to following up a rival's version of the story it had itself turned down. Last Saturday it ran a piece about the PCC's review of Greenslade's new evidence, in which business hack Russell Hotten asked his own media commentator for a quote on the *Grauniad* story that the *Telegraph* could have had to itself four days earlier.

The *Telegraph*'s attitude to this latest twist in the Slickers affair is even harder to fathom given that it was the *Daily Telegraph* which originally broke the story about Morgan's share dealings. On 2 February 2000 a story by Suzy Jagger quoted Moron as admitting he had bought "about £20,000" worth of Viglen shares – only £47,000 short of the true figure, but a good story none the less.

Why did the *Telegraph* get cold feet? It clearly could not be because it shied away from embarrassing former Trinity Mirror chairman Sir Victor Blank, now chairman-designate of Lloyds TSB. And it obviously had nothing to do with the fact that the PCC director in 2000, Guy Black, now runs corporate affairs for the *Telegraph*. Nor can the *Telegraph*'s senior management have been influenced by a series of phone calls received from former *Mirror* chief exec Philip Graf shortly after he had been called by Greenslade. One can only conclude that even the world's finest newspapers have their off days.

WILL the libel action brought by Ashley Cole against the *Sun* and *News of the World* reach the courts? There was no immediate retraction from either title when lawyers for the Arsenal and England footballer delivered their writs on 2 March. But five days later, in what looked like the first step of a calculated withdrawal, the *Sun* printed flattering photos of Cole engaged in publicity work for a testicular cancer charity.

If this is a tilt towards an amicable out-of-court compromise, it could have more to do with circulation worries than any concern for the truth and the footballer's feelings. With the World Cup approaching in June, the two Murdoch tabloids need exclusive access to our boys. But few are currently willing to speak to them except through lawyers.

Besides Ashley Cole, Wayne Rooney is suing the *Sun* for claiming that he slapped his girlfriend in a bar. John Terry has withdrawn his co-operation with the paper after a front-page story alleging that he two-timed his girlfriend. Nor is it likely to get much from Gary Neville, whose girlfriend accepted £75,000 in damages last year over a *Sun* story falsely accusing her of cheating on Neville while he was away at Euro 2004. She was said to be "devastated" by the *Sun*'s behaviour.

Meanwhile the *News of the Screws* is at legal loggerheads with not only Ashley Cole but also Sven-Goran Eriksson, who is suing for breach of confidence over the fake-sheikh sting. Until last week the paper was also facing a libel action from David and Victoria Beckham over allegations that their marriage was a sham. Although the case has now been settled, the England captain hasn't forgotten or forgiven the *Screws'* buy-ups of his former aide Rebecca Loos and ex-nanny Abbie Gibson.

The big test of resolve will come with the Wayne Rooney case, which has been set for trial on 2 May. Does the *Sun* really want a fight with England's most important player just a month before the cup, as Rooney-mania sweeps the nation? Expect a settlement soon.

LAST MONTH we reported the *Grauniad*'s spiking of a review from eminent crime-writer Michael Dibdin because it was "too negative" about a new thriller, *The Righteous Men* by Sam Bourne. The problem? Sam Bourne is the pseudonym of *Grauniad* bigwig Jonathan Freedland, making a desperate (and doomed) effort to break in to the Dan Brown market.

Lord Gnome has now learned more about how the piece came to be suppressed, which sheds fascinating light on the *Grauniad*'s editorial processes. When the Dibdin review arrived, hilariously trashing Freedland's thriller, literary editor Claire Armitstead went to editor Alan Rusbridger and asked what to do about it. Amazingly, Rusbridger then referred the piece to Sam Bourne himself, aka Jonathan Freedland, asking if he wanted it to run.

Surprise, surprise, Freedland said no. And so it came to pass.

Not that this spared the wretched Freedland. Angry at the *Grauniad*'s censorship, Dibdin took his article to the *Times*, which was delighted to print it. A month after publication, it remains the only review of any kind for *The Righteous Men*.

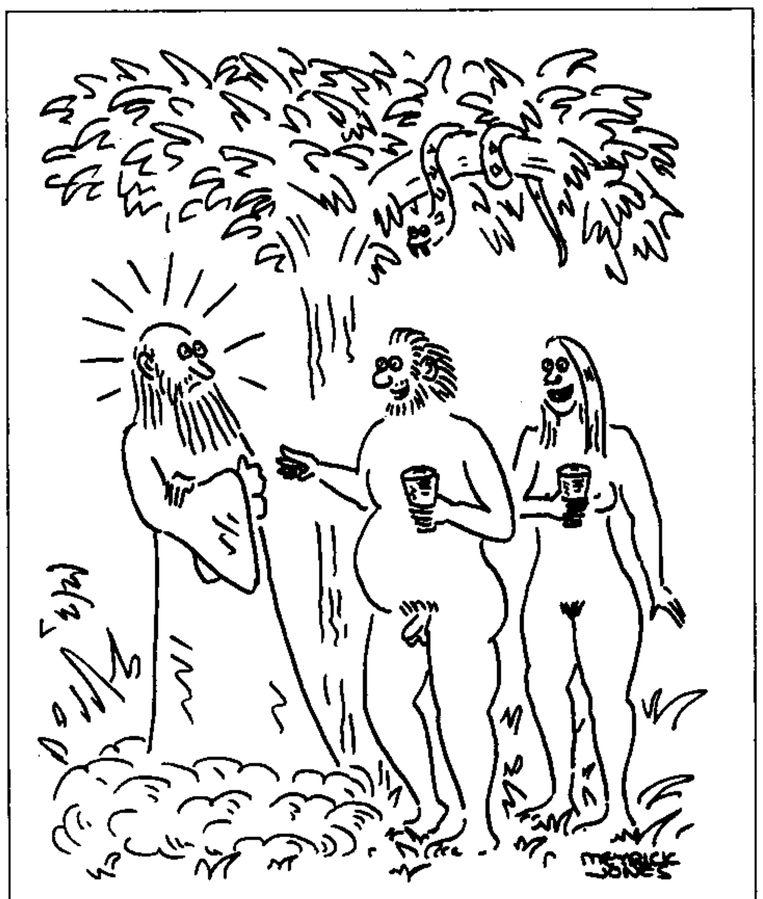
Still fuming, Freedland has now advised Armitstead that she should never ask Dibdin to write for the *Grauniad* again.

DAVID Blunkett brought his great knowledge of financial misdeeds, public break-ups and exactly how much you can get away with before having to resign from the cabinet to bear on the Tessa Jowell affair in his *Sun* column last week.

"Isn't it strange that her most outspoken critics come from her own side," he mused. "The doleful Glenda Jackson spoke of quantities of money 'washing around like a vast laundrette'. Well, Glenda would have learned all about that through her acting links with the great money machine in Hollywood."

Blunkett is presumably referring to the scandalous fact before Jackson became an MP she used to work as an actress and, er, got paid for it. And what of his own "links to the great money machine", which include conducting an adulterous relationship with an American millionairess, spending his weekends on the Duchess of Devonshire's estate, ignoring ministerial rules to make a bit of quick cash in between resignations, and continuing to live in a freebie home in Belgravia worth £3m for five months after being sacked?

Sheffield's man of the people (who more than doubles his MP's salary with the fee he receives from the *Sun*) did not think they were worth mentioning.



"Luckily for us the serpent pointed out that without a styrofoam container of coffee in our hands we'd be walking around stark naked'

WHILE filling pages galore with the scandal enveloping David Mills and Silvio Berlusconi, neither the *Sunday Times* nor any other Murdoch rag has seen fit to mention another special friend and business associate of *Il Dottore*, as the Italian PM is known to chums.

We refer, of course, to *Il Dirty Diggere*, whose News Corp had a partnership with Berlusconi's Mediaset. Until last December, that is, when Murdoch pulled the plug on his mate without warning. As the American trade paper *Variety* put it: "Mediaset, Sky Parting Ways – Silvio, Rupe to Split".

This was especially surprising as their Sky Italia joint venture had become quite lucrative, thanks not least to the soft-porn Duel-tv channel Berlusconi's staff provided as part of born-again Rupert's Sky package.

Although the unexpected ditching of Sky Italia will cost Murdoch a lot of euros, in the light of recent events it suddenly seems rather wise and prescient. Could it be that someone, perhaps with high-level political knowledge, tipped off the Digger that more than usual trouble was brewing in Rome, some of it related to *Il Dottore*'s TV and film interests? If so, his hacks weren't telling.

Meanwhile the *Times* also failed to give the full story when its front page on 13 March reported breathlessly that: "A secret government report seen by the *Times* suggests that up to 40 supercasinos – far more than previously expected – are to be built... The report also reveals that there are nearly twice as many gambling addicts as the government first claimed."

This is of particular interest of course to one R. Murdoch, who has invested heavily in the Anschutz Entertainment Group, which is currently redeveloping the site of the Millennium Dome. In the words of the *LA Times* last December, it is also "banking on South African billionaire Sol Kerzner, owner of lavish resorts in the Bahamas, Dubai, South Africa and the Maldives, to build a Las Vegas-style casino" there.

WHEN compiling his next honours list, the prime minister should be sure to include Jonathan Brenton, head of the press department at the British embassy in Berlin. The man's devotion to duty, and to the Dear Leader, is exemplary.

A senior foreign correspondent from the respected German weekly *Die Zeit* recently applied to the Berlin embassy for a facility to visit troops and diplomatic staff in Basra. Brenton declined the request – because the German hack had written a profile of Tony Blair three years ago which wasn't flattering enough.

Asked to elaborate, Brenton explained: "We are in the propaganda business."

BAA HUMBUG

HALLEY'S comet, Peter Mandelson resigning, Ulrika being dumped and Tim Henman getting knocked out of Wimbledon: some stories can be relied on to turn up regularly in the papers with only the tiniest alterations required to bring them up to date.

One such is that which reappeared in the *Sun, Mail, Times* and *Mirror*, and most spectacularly, emblazoned across the front of the *Daily Express* last week: "Political Correctness goes mad at the nursery: NOW IT'S 'BAA BAA RAINBOW SHEEP'."

According to the *Express*: "Teachers at a government-backed school were ordered to change the lyrics of the classic Baa Baa Black Sheep... The idea was to 'avoid offending children' and keep in line with 'equal opportunities'."

This tale – wherein a politically correct administrator insists that children remove all references that could be considered racist from "Baa Baa Black Sheep" – first surfaced in February 1986, when the *Daily Star* and *Sun* declared that "loony left-wing councillors" had banned children at Hackney play groups from singing the rhyme. It was not true then either.

Neither was it true in October of that year, when the *Daily Mail* claimed play leaders on a Haringey council racism awareness course had been told to stamp out the song; nor in 1987, when Islington Council went to court to stop an SDP party political broadcast which falsely claimed they had imposed a ban; nor in 2000 when various papers relocated it to Birmingham; and nor in 2005 when the *Mail on Sunday* moved it all the way up to Aberdeen.

For the record, the charity Parents and Children Together, which runs the two play groups at the centre of last week's outbreak, told the Press Association that "children at the two family centres sing a variety of descriptive words in the nursery rhyme to turn the song into an action rhyme. They sing happy, sad, bouncing, hopping, pink, blue, black and white sheep etc. This encourages the children to extend their vocabulary." Curiously, this explanation went unreported by any of the national papers.

Number crunching

700,000

■ Bonuses paid last year to Thames Water directors, who have just imposed a hosepipe ban

70,000

■ Days a hosepipe would have to run to waste as much water as Thames Water leaks every day

CALLED TO ORDURE

TESSA JOWELL's baffling survival (so far) is proof not only of the power of the wimmin's lobby but also of MPs' hatred of Fleet Street.

This tribalism was voiced in the Commons by Labour's Barry Sheerman, the Member for Arslikhan, who on the day of Jowell's "big Commons test" attacked reporters for mounting a "witchhunt" against the fragrant minister.

Bristling with righteousness, Sheerman harked back to the age "50 years ago when journalists and TV stations had integrity, courage, independence and honesty". How odd that he made no mention of the integrity, courage, independence and honesty of members of parliament and the cabinet!

ONE man who cannot be faulted is Labour's David Taylor, who laid into the Dear Leader at prime minister's questions over trust schools.

Taylor's tone was remarkably sceptical – downright rude even – and he ended by accusing the PM of "the politics of Lewis Carroll".

The moment he sat down, however, the two Labour MPs either side of him moved perceptibly away, putting clear green leather between themselves and the outspoken MP. At Westminster it never pays to get too close to a man with an independent mind.

WESTMINSTER has coped heroically without Speaker Martin – so well that mutinous voices are now suggesting it's time "Gorbals Mick" did everyone a favour and retired.

Mr Speaker surprised MPs by having heart surgery during the February half-term break. When the Commons re-assembled, Tony Blair led flowery tributes to the convalescing Martin. Some backbenchers echoed the prime minister's get-well message, no doubt hoping that the absent Martin would hear of their toadying and favour them on his return.

MPs are incredibly cautious about criticising a Speaker, even one as dopey as Martin; but in private it is not hard to find Hon Members who wish the old bugger would use his heart problem as a convenient excuse to quit.

So, given that he's been a widely-acknowledged dud as Speaker, who could succeed him? His deputy, Sir Alan Haselhurst, has done well filling in over the past fortnight. The veteran Labour MP Gwyneth Dunwoody would also cut a glorious figure in the chair; but the sharp-tongued Gwyneth probably has too few allies ever to get elected.

'Gavel Basher'

WEALTH & EFFICIENCY

LAST month's National Audit Office (NAO) report on the government's efficiency programme, under which £21bn a year is supposed to be saved by 2008, revealed great progress in achieving the other target for the project: cutting more than 70,000 civil service jobs.

Particularly successful were the Department of Work and Pensions (14,215 so far out of a target of 30,000) and HM Revenue and Customs (3,246 out of an expected 13,350). What wasn't mentioned in the NAO report, however, is that while shedding staff both departments continue their extravagant splurges on consultants.

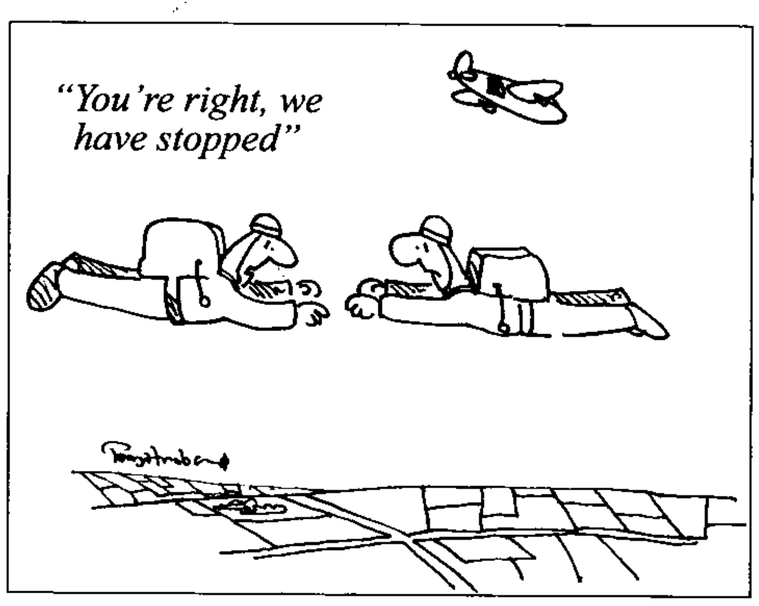
It emerged in parliament recently that DWP alone has spent £4bn on advisers in the last three years, with ongoing contracts continuing the rate of expenditure; while a fortnight ago the *Sunday Telegraph* revealed that HMRC had brought in around 80 IT consultants from PA Consulting at up to £1,000 a day to cover jobs that can't be filled for fear of compromising the all-important targets for job reductions.

But guess what? Under the quintessentially "new" Labour efficiency programme, the extortionate costs of employing armies of consultants don't count against the £21bn money-saving target, which will be achieved through a series of discrete initiatives. If extra costs crop up elsewhere in government departments as result of job cuts, well that's OK – the "efficiency" targets aren't affected.

In fact, far from criticising the use of consultants, the NAO report encourages it: one of its case studies in how to be more efficient is the outsourcing by BT of its entire personnel function to Accenture. Now there's an idea for the new head of personnel for the civil service, Gill Rider – just recruited from, er, Accenture (see last *Eye*). And, equally helpfully, the auditors provide an "efficiency toolkit" for struggling departments. This too was dreamt up by consultants – from the ubiquitous PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Expect the efficiency programme to be announced a resounding success in a couple of years – and consultants everywhere to be grinning from ear to ear.

PS. The brains behind the efficiency review, Sir Peter Gershon, has just become a partner of Robson Rhodes Business Consulting, which earns millions on government contracts.



IT'S A MOD WORLD

YET another cock-up at the Ministry of Defence as it contemplates a £100m white elephant in the shape of a huge empty aircraft "superhangar" in South Wales.

Soon after it had given the go ahead for the hangar at St Athan in 2003, the MoD decided to transfer the jet and helicopter repair work of the Defence Aviation Repair Agency (DARA) to the RAF at its bases in England. It has now emerged that plans for the move were already in the offing when the decision to build the hangar was made, prompting parliament's defence select committee to describe the decision to go ahead regardless as "incomprehensible and extraordinary".

Tory chairman James Arbuthnot lamented: "This story has not been a happy one… the combination of decisions – to pour taxpayers' money into an outstanding new facility in St Athan at the very same time as the MoD was conducting a review which would take the work away from that facility – so that the MoD then had to spend millions more on re-providing those facilities elsewhere, was quite extraordinary."

WHILE the odd hundred million can be wasted without too much of a fuss, the MoD is desperate to meet its crude "efficiency" targets by cutting jobs (15,000 to go altogether) wherever it can and regardless of the consequences.

One particularly hard-hit area is Shropshire, where around 1,200 jobs are set to go under plans to relocate forces repair work run from Donnington and logistics work in Telford to the Bristol and Bath area.

Unions point out the false economy of losing hundreds of skilled staff only to have to recruit far more expensively further south (which also flies in the face of government policy to move public sector work *away* from areas of low unemployment and high wage demands), especially when deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan make professional procurement something of a priority.

But the MoD is determined to press on. Defence bosses even signed a lease on a new building in Bristol to house logistics work without telling staff or consulting them on the move.

As the recent defence industry strategy paper pointed to increased outsourcing, ie privatization, of procurement and the south west is home to MoD favourite BAe, many suspect the move is part of an unannounced wider plan. Unions and local MPs are outraged and have persuaded the NAO to investigate.

TAX DODGY

AFTER years of refusing to say how much tax it thinks is lost to the scams of clever lawyers and accountants, HM Revenue and Customs has claimed that it could be around £10bn a year (enough to resolve the NHS's current financial woes about 15 times over).

The figure was divulged to a *Money Programme* report on how the wealthy have legally dodged their bills for years, which also highlighted the Revenue's successes in shutting down some of the loopholes.

(Strangely, when *Private Eye* asked for similar information under freedom of information laws, the Revenue refused, claiming that providing figures would be "misleading as a contribution to informed debate" and "might prejudice exchequer receipts" – unimportant, it now appears, if some flattering coverage is on offer).

What the *Money Programme* didn't ask, however, is why, if this much money is haemorrhaging from public services every year, do government efforts to stop the outflow by closing loopholes only ever, on the Treasury's own figures, stem a small fraction of it? The answer is that the chancellor has consistently balked at outlawing tax avoidance outright, through what's known as a "general anti-avoidance rule" as it would upset business too much.

BALLOONING profits at building society-turned-bank Halifax, now HBOS (just up 17 percent to £4.8bn), haven't deterred the company's directors chasing a few million more through a dodgy tax avoidance scheme that earlier this month was dubbed by judges an "abusive practice".

Looking to build a couple of new call centres a few years ago, Halifax found that like any bank in such a position it would incur a sizeable VAT bill that it couldn't recover. But rather than pay up and get on with it, the bank set up an elaborate series of companies and transactions that enabled it to get the VAT back, but had little to do with building anything.

After years of wrangling in the British courts, last month the European court decided that this "abusive practice" could be struck out so the bill would have to be paid after all. But who pursued such a despicable attempt at ripping off the taxpayer? Step forward pillars of the establishment chairman Lord (Dennis) Stevenson and chief executive James Crosby. Stevenson also chairs the House of Lords appointments commission, which vets all new peers and selects the independent ones.

Crosby, meanwhile, is a director of the Financial Services Authority (FSA), the regulator responsible for upholding standards of probity in the financial sector. Perfect positions for such determined abusers of the tax system.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Water is a public resource not a commodity to be bought and sold by the pint."

– Early day motion opposing water metering laid by Elliot Morley MP in 1995.

"In many parts of the country water is a precious resource which we can no longer simply take for granted… Metering will have an important role to play in helping to reduce this demand as well as sending a signal about the benefits of water saving."

– Announcement by Environment Minister Elliot Morley, March 2006.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

LAST YEAR Gordon Brown added to his sudden popularity for his backing of the Make Poverty History campaign by announcing that helping the developing world through trade talks was a "moral obligation".

With Britain holding the presidency of the European Union, he certainly made sure his civil servants then took the moral high ground when chairing a meeting of European trade negotiators in London a few months later. The Eurocrats were taken to the pub and for a jolly ride on the London Eye before being sat down with a bunch of corporate lobbyists. At no point did the government invite any campaigners for trade justice into the closed meetings.

Details of the visit by the EU's "133 Services Committee" last October were released to the World Development Movement following an appeal under the Freedom of Information Act. The EU committee advises on trade negotiations and is *widely* seen as having great power in setting the European agenda in world trade talks; but it is also strangely secretive and publishes neither its membership list nor any minutes.

After a "flight" on the London Eye and a "Visit to (one of several) London pubs", the trade experts were entertained to dinner, before meeting the business lobby group, the European Services Forum, the next day. This is in fact a forum of banks and consultants – Accenture, PriceWaterhouse, KPMG and Barclays – who want to use trade talks to push "services", including privatisation, on the developing world. As the name suggests, these are European firms and the group does not represent developing world businesses that want to sell their services back to Europe.

The EU negotiators ended up having only one and a half hours of trade talks compared to two and a half hours lobbying, and precisely zero hours with anyone from the developing world. So much for "moral obligations"!

PS: When Roger Liddle, the Blair aide who went on to assist Peter Mandelson as EU trade commissioner, was asked by Radio 4's *File on Four* last year if he knew anything about the European Services Forum, he said: "This idea that the European Services Forum has privileged access to the 133 Committee, in my view is nonsense. End of story. Nonsense."

EU-phemisms

Just like the Common Agricultural Policy...er...

WHITE-COLLAR criminals in Brussels will be laughing at the punishment recommended for Edith Cresson, the former EU commissioner whose dodgy-dealing helped bring down the Jacques Santer regime.

The advocate-general of the European Court of Justice has suggested that naughty Edith, a former prime minister of France, might eventually have her Brussels pension of £2,600 a month – gasp! – cut in half. Before readers start passing round the hat, the ultra-mild sanction still has to be approved by a court (which could take another three to six months) and is not a foregone conclusion.

Cresson previously got off a Belgian court charge which accused her of handing bogus contracts worth £90,000 to her dentist and boyfriend. She could have been jailed for up to five years for that charge.

The advocate-general's suggested non-punishment was made in the light of the "administrative culture" in Brussels at the time Cresson served with the commission and took into account the fact that Cresson's reputation has already been badly dented. If a little drop in income, six years after the event, really is the price you pay for helping bring down a commission, it'll be trebles all round in the Brussels jobs-for-life-club.

A LOTTO CHEEK

IT SEEMS nobody now bothers to pretend that it isn't the government that decides how National Lottery money should be spent.

Last month the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) awarded £15m to the Children's Play Council, a coalition of children's charities, for a national scheme to encourage play and improve play areas.

Children's charities began lobbying the government to stump up cash for play projects back in 1998. £200m from the New Opportunities Fund (forerunner to the BLF) for play was promised in Labour's 2001 manifesto and Frank Dobson completed a review of how to spend it in 2004. All that remained was for the BLF to rubber-stamp it and hand over the money. The £15m is just a fraction of the lottery money set aside for the Play England project; local authorities can start bidding this month for a further £124m.

The harmony between ministers and the BLF may have the Play Council purring, but others in the voluntary sector are furious that the government's sticky fingers are in the lottery pot. A 2003-04 select committee report found that the principle of "additionality" – only funding things that do not replace mainstream government funding – was being "increasingly eroded".

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations published a lottery briefing paper last month calling for the National Lottery Bill, which will legalise the Tessa Jowell-railroaded merger of the Community Fund and New Opportunities Fund into the Big Lottery Fund, to retain this additionality principle. "Lottery funding should be additional to what should be properly funded from general taxation and not a substitute for it," the paper says. "It should not be used to fund essential services or government-inspired programmes."

That appears to be a forlorn hope. The bill requires the BLF to "comply" with directions from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport – unlike the Community Fund, which was only obliged to "take account" of such directions.

Number crunchings

£3,000,000

■ Cost to NHS of pension for Sir Nigel Crisp following his early retirement as chief executive

£300,000,000

■ Cost to NHS of redundancy payments from abandoning Primary Care Trusts which were only set up in 2002

Down on the Farm

A CURIOUS episode in Wiltshire again highlights the strangely intimate relationship which exists between council officials and the lobby groups which campaign for country footpaths and bridleways to be made accessible to vehicles such as motorcycles, quad bikes and off-road 4x4s.

In recent years the bikers have caused increasing havoc on hundreds of such "green lanes", and their aim is to get as many as possible "upgraded" from RUPPs (roads used as public paths) from which vehicles are barred, to BOATS (byways open to all traffic).

When a Mr Bill Riley applied to Wiltshire County Council for vehicles to use a narrow, leafy "green lane" in West Grimstead, the villagers who enjoy walking down the footpath were horrified. 4x4s would inevitably tear off the branches of protected trees, gouge out the steep banks and churn the footpath's surface to mud. But officials of the council's rights-of-way committee nodded through Mr Riley's application without even a site visit.

It then turned out that Mr Riley had a rather closer association with these officials than had been clear. It seemed he had often put in such applications before, either privately or representing the Trail Riders Fellowship, a body innocuously described on the council website as promoting the "conservation of heritage of green lanes". On its own website, however, the TRF rather more honestly admits that it is for people who "enjoy exploring green lanes by motor cycle". Mr Riley had also, it seemed, been consulted by the council on such issues many times.

When council representatives were challenged on their relationship with Mr Riley, the rights of way manager merely claimed that he "assists the council as a voluntary researcher". The council's chief executive, Dr Keith Robinson, denied even this, stating unequivocally that "Mr Riley is not consulted by the council". The chairman of the regulatory committee, however, was rather more forthright: Mr Riley is "consulted on every application".

At this point Dr Robinson backtracked, explaining that Mr Riley was not consulted in his "private capacity" but only as representing the Trail Riders Fellowship. He refused to clarify the position further. A bemused councillor commented that Mr Riley seemed to be acting as "batsman, bowler and wicketkeeper" all at once.

So enraged were the villagers by all these evasions and contradictions that they complained to the local government Standards Board, which replied that, since the decision to upgrade the lane had been made by officials, not councillors, it was not their business. The Audit Commission also declined to get involved, saying that such matters were the responsibility of the local government ombudsman. He replied that it was not in his remit either. So they then wrote to the minister, Jim Knight, who also said it was the responsibility of the ombudsman. When they went back yet again to the ombudsman, quoting the minister, they were told the matter would now be given "further consideration". Meanwhile, as one body of officials after another passes the parcel, the villagers of West Grimstead grimly await the day when the first covey of 20 bikers roars its way down their green lane, chewing up its grass and wild flowers into a sea of mud.

'Muckspreader'

"Stand back – it's a hooded cobra!"

TV

Davina (BBC1)
Parkinson (BBC1)
Planet Earth (BBC1)

LUVVIES always say the difference between theatre and television is that, if you get crap reviews and no audience on stage, you have to turn up every night; but at least in TV it's on tape and you're in the Bahamas or waiting tables in Joe Allen's by the time it goes out.

That comfort, though, only applies to drama. In live factual television, the cast and crew have exactly the same nightmare of going through the paces watched only by ghouls who have come along to see if it's as bad as everyone says.

Davina, taking a pasting in the ratings, kicked around like a red-headed step-kid by the critics, is a case in point. The BBC's attempt to turn the presenter of *Big Brother* into a big sister of the talk-show format crashed in the first week when it became clear that they couldn't get the guests and she didn't get the format. But they were stuck with doing another seven.

The fourth finally got an A-list star – er, Jordan – but even that encounter backfired because Davina is so shaken by the reception of her series that she and Katie P spent most of their segments swapping outrage about how beastly people can be about celebrities. Then the mess the series was in became clear when they were reduced to filling the second chair with Eamonn Holmes, who was presumably knocking round the nearby canteen while waiting to front the *National Lottery Midweek* draws later that night on BBC1.

As *Davina* and the decline of **Parkinson** have confirmed, the problem for the mainstream TV talk-show is that it is courting the tabloid audience without being able to ask any of the red-top questions. Apart from the fact that Davina and Parky are themselves part of the showbiz aristocracy and so have to keep the doorstep clean, the shows are so desperate to get even passable stars to come on that any uncomfortable subjects are ignored.

So, on *Davina*, big Eamonn is never asked about his weight, which is generally the opening poser in a newspaper interview; and Jordan is never picked up on her brutal habit of referring to the one of her children born without a disability as "the normal one". And, most spectacularly, big Eamonn simply can't be quizzed about the disastrous ratings for his new Sky

show because, if he were, he could play a spectacular game of Snap with the quiz-mistress.

Admittedly, the prime minister's gamble in appearing on *Parkinson* went slightly wrong because Parky actually did his interviewer's duty, asking about Tony's dodgy ticker and following up on the reference to "faith". Sadly, the reason for this may not be that Parkinson has suddenly got tougher, but that the prime minister is now defined on the celebrity-booking circuit as a depreciating asset.

Given that it's taken nine years to get Blair in the chair, they are never going to need him again and so the questions could risk going slightly off piste; nor does the talent agency representing Blair, the Number 10 press office, look after a roster of other stars who might be withdrawn from future shows if he was given a hard time.

Sadly, in other circumstances such calculations hobble the talk-show. If Madonna ever appears, she isn't asked properly about the kabbala or Guy Ritchie because the producers know that she's a Macca or Sir Elton or Billy Connolly: someone they will be competing to get for each new release or memoir until she dies. Jonathan Ross just about gets round this by using a cheeky attitude to disguise how soft his questions really are; but they are all increasingly doomed to be PR people.

Planet Earth, whispering Dave Attenborough's latest show, has drawn the usual plaudits (marvellous photography, worth ten years of geography lessons, isn't he a living saint, blah blah blah), all of them justified. Depressingly, though, the series knocks down one of the few remaining causes for optimism about the state of TV. For years, we have consoled ourselves that, whatever the obsessions elsewhere with yoof and focus groups and public access, whispering Dave just went on making his programmes in exactly the same way he always has.

Well, now the zombies in the executive corridors have finally got to him as well. Billed in *Radio Times* to run for 60 minutes, the opening episode stuttered to a halt after 50 and was then filled by 10 minutes of behind-the-scenes featurettes about the marvellous marvellous camera chaps and other personnel who had brought us the pictures we'd just seen.

What this most resembled was the kind of extras only nerds would watch on the DVD being stuck into the original transmission. Apart from the sheer tedium of the material, the novelty is likely to be copied by other shows. Soon, we will be getting 10 minutes of footage of *Davina's* team putting that week's edition together. On reflection, their existential despair over being lumbered with a show no-one wants to watch and a presenter who wishes she'd never signed up might make unmissable viewing.

'Remote Controller'

AD NAUSEAM

NEWS that Wayne Rooney – a man previously only noted for his fondness for pizza and Chinese takeaways – and his fiancée Coleen McLoughlin are to be the faces of Asda came as something of a surprise to conference attendees who listened last October to a warning from Asda president Andy Bond that celebrities should be "used with caution" in marketing because of "the danger when there is a disparity between them and the company".

His comments came a month after Asda and Sharon Osbourne mutually decided to part company just seven months into her own contract to promote the supermarket – and three months before marketing director Chris Pilling, the man responsible for hiring the millionairess mother of two children who had attended rehab to front the "mums in a million" value-for-money campaign, departed his post without another job to go to.

Two pending libel cases – one brought by Rooney himself over claims that he slapped McLoughlin in a nightclub and another by a 50-year-old grandmother accused by the *Sun* of being one of the many prostitutes Rooney admits to having sex with – have the potential to throw any lovey-dovey ads featuring the couple into an interesting light, as does the footballer's notorious inability to control his temper on pitch, which will be sorely tested during this summer's world cup.

But if things don't work out, Bond and his colleagues will at least be able to console themselves with the fact that Rooney and McLoughlin are cheap at half the price of Osbourne: whereas she was reported to have signed up for one year at a price of £7m, her successors have apparently devoted a full two-and-a-half years to the store for a mere £3.5m. Harper Collins – which splashed out £5m for Rooney's life story the same week – must be kicking itself.

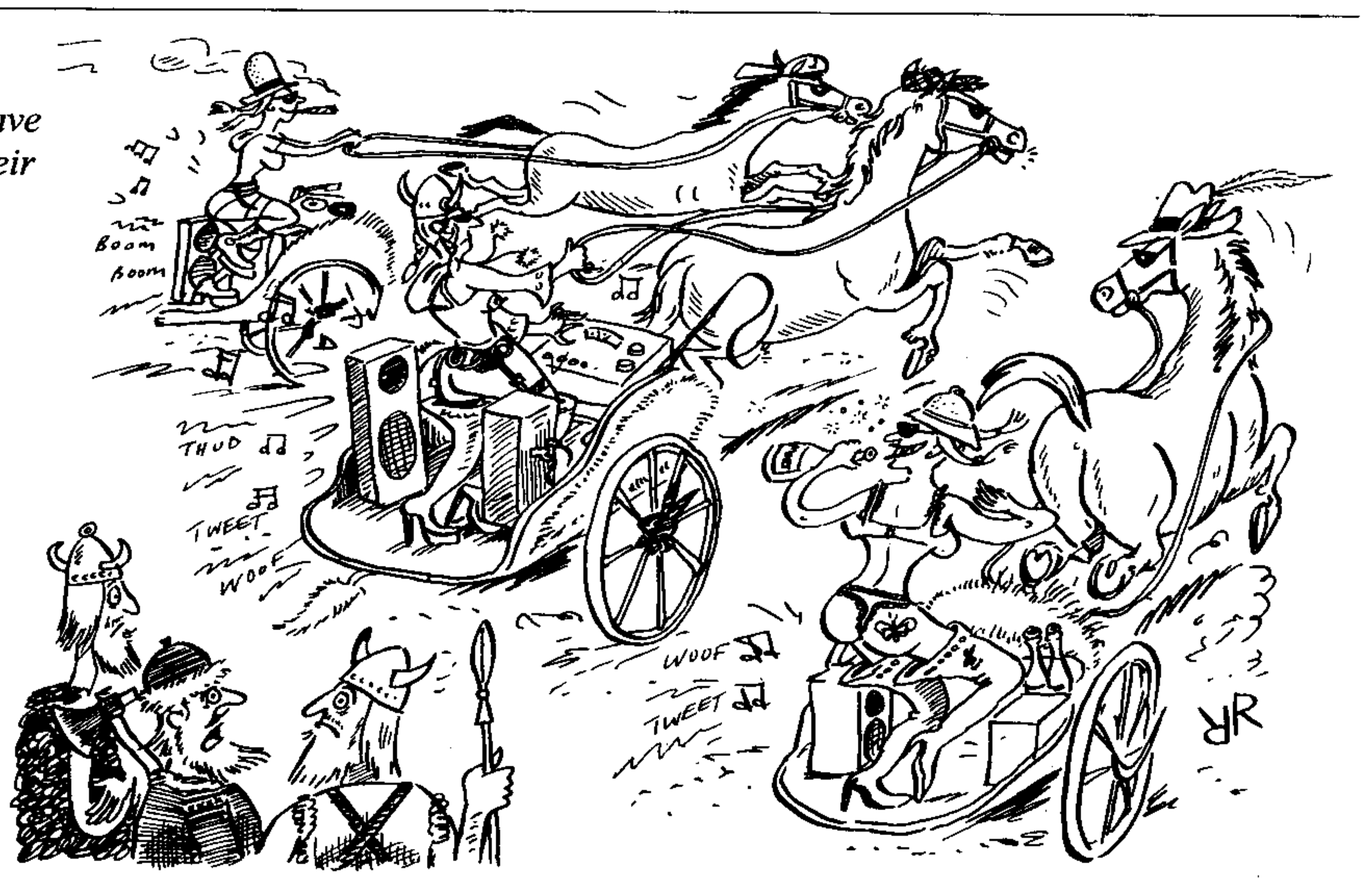
ON THE eve of announcing so-so financial results last week, ITV urgently needed a good news story. Thus the joyous scoop in Wednesday's *FT*. "Unilever is today expected to announce a four-year agreement to buy £200m worth of airtime with ITV, bucking the trend of declining advertising revenues," media editor Andrew Edgecliffe-Johnson revealed.

A strikingly different headline adorned the front of *Campaign* magazine the very next day: "Unilever cuts £120m from spend with ITV."

The *Campaign* version was right. Unilever has renewed its four-year agreement with ITV, but on sharply reduced terms. Whereas the ad deal signed in 2002 was worth £320m, the new one is a mere £200m.

It takes rare talent to present a £120m *reduction* as an example of "bucking the trend of declining revenues". Shouldn't ITV's miracle-working spin-doctors be given their own prime-time series?

"I see the Valkyries have 'pimped' their rides"



DUMB BRITAIN

Big Quiz, LBC

Gary King: Name the funny men who once entertained kings and queens at court.
Contestant: Lepers.

Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: In the Lord's Prayer, what word beginning with 'H' meaning 'blessed' comes before 'be thy name'?
Contestant (*quietly*): Howard.
Robinson (*incredulously*): Pardon?
Contestant (*louder*): Howard.

Dick & Dom In Da Bungalow, BBC1

Dick (*or possibly Dom*): In which city were the recent Winter Olympics held?
Contestant: Taunton.

MEDIA NEWS

MARK THOMPSON, director-general of the BBC, is about to "outsource" the BBC's highly respected engineering and technical training unit to that world-famous broadcasting powerhouse, er, Capita.

Stephen Davies, "programme director BBC outsourcing", clearly does not read the *Eye*. He describes Crapita as "a credible proposition... having proven it is able to manage complex training exercises." An orderly queue for voluntary redundancy is already being formed by BBC engineers.

AS the BBC's director of news Helen Boaden told the in-house propaganda rag *Ariel*: "51 percent of people in News now agree that the BBC has a clear vision of the future – up from 38 percent."

Elsewhere in the same edition was the following quote from MORI, which was behind the survey from which Boaden quoted. "People are much less clear than last year about the future direction of the BBC and how it relates to their everyday lives." Shome mishtake, surely?

BBC News bulletins often carry barely disguised plugs for other BBC programmes. But the *One O'Clock News* has gone a step further, devoting space to a package from Duncan Kennedy about "a unique television experiment" produced by one of the Beeb's competitors.

Called *Trading Races*, this reality show involves the cosmetic "blacking up" of white people in the vain hope that once under the grease paint they might find out "what life is really like" for ethnic minorities. If this sounds rather more familiar than unique, it is because the BBC has already wasted a huge amount of licence payers' money back in 2002 on an identical project.

The problem is that the BBC's Diversity Unit likes the "new" idea and can see no problem airing a lavish plug for a series produced by F/X, the cable subsidiary of Rupert Murdoch's Fox TV on the Beeb's so-called "flagship" news programmes.

IN HER Sky documentary *Celebrities on Heat*, broadcast on 6 March, Julie Burchill triumphantly concluded that Davina McCall and Jordan are the new role models for modern women, who cannot get enough information about their lives.

Two nights later, Jordan was the star guest on Davina McCall's BBC1 chatshow. It recorded its lowest viewing figures so far – 2.5m, only one percentage point ahead of the audience which watched a documentary about the great apes of Congo on BBC2.

LAST October, at the Hotel Majestic in Cannes, Andrew "Brillo Pad" Neill announced the launch of a new TV rights fund which would "transform the way investment in media takes place".

His World Media Rights (WMR) would raise £30m and "be a catalyst for new and challenging television production, free of the dominance of old television tsars", he told hacks attending the bi-annual TV market.

Thrilling stuff. Only afterwards did the hacks realise that Brillo had announced precisely nothing – no specified projects, and no clue as to where the £30m would be found.

Fast forward five months to late February, and this innovative, challenging, transforming outfit had still done nothing. Yet in an interview with the *Evening Standard* Brillo claimed that WMR "hopes to raise up to £100m". He also promised "a big announcement that will knock people's socks off" in April, presumably at that month's TV industry get-together in Cannes.

Cannes can be chilly in April, so more hot air from Brillo will be welcome.

"WE CAN and will raise the overall standard of our journalism," Sky News boss Nick Pollard boasted when he relaunched his channel last October.

"We've won numerous awards over the years for our coverage of big events and breaking news but we're now mature enough as an organisation to take another step up and challenge the best television journalism elsewhere."

One such step up occurred last month, with the launch of Sky News' "Showbiz Hot or Not", which allows viewers to "decide on the hottest stars in celebville… each week you can tell us who you think is steaming hot or wet as a sopping dishcloth from our Trumps pack of celebs!"

The latest exclusive: 55 percent of Sky News viewers think Nicky Hilton is hotter than her sister Paris.

IN THE last *Eye* we reported how World Service commissioning editor Harriet Green had justified the axing of *Off the Shelf*, the station's literature programme, by assuring worried listeners that "all the information we have indicates that serendipity is not what people want".

But do all Ms Green's colleagues agree with her? At least one does not. In a speech to the "Oxford Inspires" group last October, he opined that "one of the BBC's greatest strengths in culture has been the power of serendipity, the potential for a general audience to bump into something unexpected or intriguing, something which could be the start of a journey, a new discovery."

His name? Mark Thompson, director-general of the BBC.

BBC World, the BBC's commercially funded "news" channel, likes to boast that it is forever "putting news first". But with its *World Business Report* produced "in association with Shell", suggestions of a potential conflict of interest between journalists and sponsors become ever harder to shake off.

On 8 March the programme reported that it had been "a big day in the oil markets with a call for a big cut in production" by OPEC members. The previous week Shell had joined forecasters warning that the oil market was over-supplied and that a cut in production would be a good thing.

LUVVIES

"Some characters you carry with joy, some of them you carry in terrible pain. Playing Catherine Tramell is not a happy trip. It burns a place in you."

SHARON STONE
Daily Telegraph

Submitted by Joseph Brewer.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Gradually the Academy realised what director Ang Lee was saying with his film title...

"It's about these two brokes who are gay"

"ANG LEE is the pride of Chinese people all over the world, and he is the glory of Chinese cinematic talent," the state-owned *China Daily* announced the day after the Taiwan-born filmmaker bagged the best director Oscar. "His honour brings joy to the Chinese."

Needless to say, Lee's film *Brokeback Mountain* is not approved for release in cinemas by the Chinese government.

LORD Ballyedmond's legal campaign against villagers opposing his planning application for a car park (*Eyes* 1152 & 1153) intensified this month, as his company's lawyers served a writ on one parish councillor.

Nigel Holmes, a former BBC radio Cumbria presenter and parish council chairman, who now represents lay preachers on the Church of England's General Synod, lives in the village of Great Corby, near Carlisle. Multi-millionaire Lord Ballyedmond lives in Corby Castle (when not at his other castle in County Down).

The pharmaceutical magnate's company Norbrook Laboratories applied to the local council for permission for a car park to serve a pub-restaurant in the village, on land next to the recreation ground. Around 70 people objected to the scheme, raising concerns about noise (patrons of the Queen Inn would have to walk past several homes to reach their cars) and potential traffic problems. Many used an anonymously produced pre-prepared letter, setting out the concerns, which had been delivered to their homes.

Soon afterwards they received letters from Norbrook's lawyers, threatening legal action unless they withdrew their "defamatory statements". Mr Holmes denies penning or having anything to do with the pre-prepared objection letter before a copy came through his door. A writ against him claiming aggravated libel damages has been lodged with the high court of justice Queen's Bench Division.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

AGENCY
GOD — SOME ANTI-FUR PEOPLE JUST THREW FLOUR AT ME!!!
YOU MUST BE SOOO UPSET!
I AM. I SNORTED MOST OF IT BEFORE I REALISED IT WAS JUST FLOUR!!!
YOU POOR THING!

ANOTHER BLOODY WHITEWASH

THE Department of Health has just produced a 30-page report whitewashing its failure to stop importing high-risk blood products from the US which infected thousands of haemophiliacs with the liver disease, Hepatitis C virus (HCV).

As *Eye* readers will be well aware, more than 3,000 haemophiliacs in the UK contracted fatal liver disease from contaminated blood products, and many contracted HIV too. After a lengthy battle, two years ago they were finally granted "compassion payments" of between £20,000 and £45,000.

However, they have read with scorn the DoH report which concludes that they would still have been infected with HCV from contaminated blood even if the UK had stopped relying on imported donor supplies as it had pledged (but failed) to do in the mid-1970s. Especially enraged are those who have now traced their HCV infection back to blood products sourced from high risk inmates in US jails.

The DoH authors conclude that "available" evidence suggested that at the time HCV (then identified as Non-A, Non-B hepatitis) was perceived as a mild and often asymptomatic disease and the advantages of blood clotting produces was seen to outweigh any disadvantages. "Domestically sourced blood products carried this risk, albeit a smaller risk of HCV transmission, and therefore it is likely that, over time, the majority of haemophiliac patients in England and Wales would have contracted the hepatitis C virus," says the report.

It has to be asked what "available" evidence the DoH authors were studying, because evidence passed to the *Eye* some years ago showed that in the mid-1970s doctors in California wrote to the UK's then Blood Products Laboratory with a stern warning. They asked that the UK no longer source blood products from commercial blood centres in the US because of the high rates of "post transfusion" hepatitis – more than half of which were even then known to be a Non-A, Non-B hepatitis. In 1974 one of America's leading blood specialists wrote: "It does not take much commercial blood to bring up an astounding infection rate from one that is relatively unnoticed."

The US doctors also warned that the "agent is more frequently found in [the] lower socio-economic group of paid and prison donors... it is *minimal* among volunteer donors."

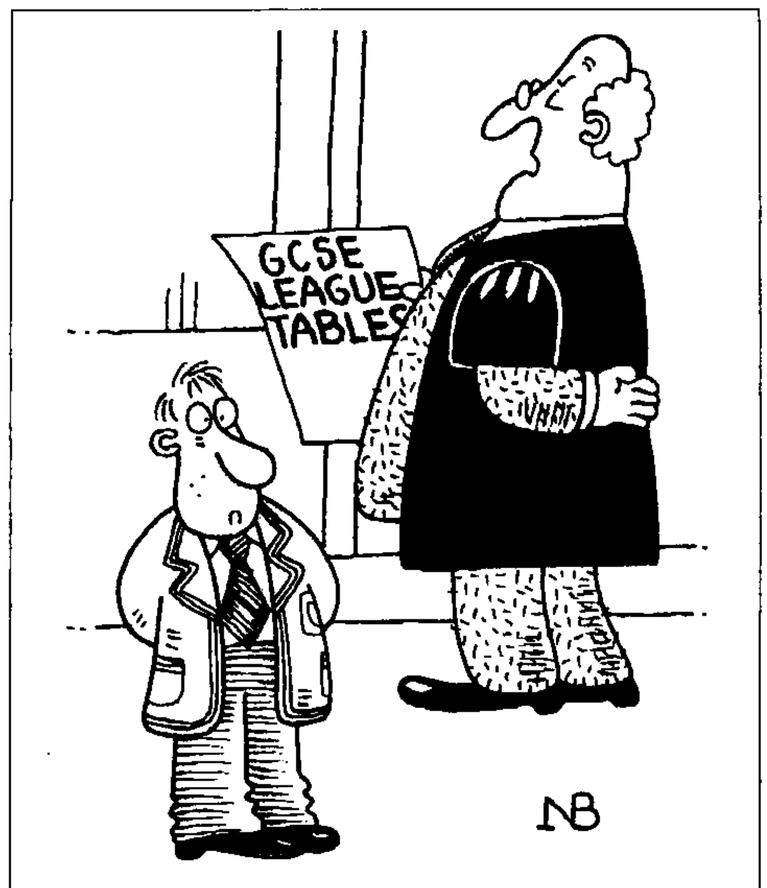
At the same time *The Lancet* also reported that a new hepatitis virus (which was HCV) had been isolated and was responsible for a staggering 90 percent of transfusion-associated illness in the US. In fact most studies of new hepatitis disease were among the recipients of blood products.

But last week's report makes no mention of these clear warnings, nor what was (or was not) done about them. And even though the then health secretary Dr David Owen promised that Britain would be self-sufficient in blood products by 1977 and made more resources available to the regional blood centres, the goal was never achieved. Blood continued to be brought in from operations abroad known to be unreliable. Today the haemophiliac community and others are still suffering and even dying often horrible deaths as a result.

The DoH whitewash does not explain either how or why some sufferers who contracted HIV were also secretly tested for HCV – but not told the results and nor why they were never informed of any of the risks of their treatment. The whole report only serves to highlight further the need for a full public inquiry into this public health disaster.

● While former partners and dependants of haemophiliacs who died of HCV liver failure are still fighting for the "compassion" money offered by the government, it has emerged that the man administering the scheme, Keith Foster, is under investigation for fraud. Foster was suspended by the Skipton Fund directors in January amid concerns that around £450,000 had gone missing. He is apparently also being investigated in relation to his previous employment with the British Association of Hand Therapists.

● In January the government announced that it was extending the provisions of the Skipton Fund. Until then it only paid out to current sufferers and the dependants of those infected patients who had died between August 2003 and July 2004. Now the government has lifted the July cut-off date, which will benefit about a dozen partners or dependants and still leave most exempt from any compensation.



"By not cheating you've let me down, you've let the school down and you've let yourself down"

SIGNAL FAILURES

Darling's FCC ups

ALISTAIR Darling's transport department, adept at botching rail franchises, has surpassed itself with Thameslink.

Thameslink, to be given the catchy new name First Capital Connect when the franchise begins next month, was awarded to FirstGroup after other bidders said Darling's pen-pushers had devised an unworkable service specification. The deal assumed 13 trains would transfer to FCC when Southern took over Gatwick Express. But hours after revealing last month that Gatwick Express would be axed, Darling's crack civil servants said they'd released the wrong document and that Gatwick Express could survive after all.

Darling won't allow the obvious solution – build more trains. He insists the Tories' rail privatisation brings in private investment, but commuters are still sardined into a Thameslink fleet nearly 25 percent smaller than under British Rail.

The treasury won't fund more trains when privatised rail already swallows about five times BR's subsidy and Darling needs an incompetence allowance. In 2004-5 Thameslink's tunnel under London closed for eight months for construction work, but Darling blocked a new St Pancras station (*Eye* 1124) when builders had free movement around the subterranean site. Last month he changed his mind. His dithering has upped the cost to £50m. Trains running through the building site will complicate site management. The station is needed when Eurostar trains switch from Waterloo to St Pancras next year, so builders will work night shifts, at premium rates, to make up for lost time.

"NEW" Labour is showing its commitment to global warming by ordering rail cuts in Cornwall. Draft First Great Western timetables, released last month, show four trains a day for Newquay instead of seven, despite 40 percent passenger growth in four years. Apparently there isn't enough public cash to maintain existing services.

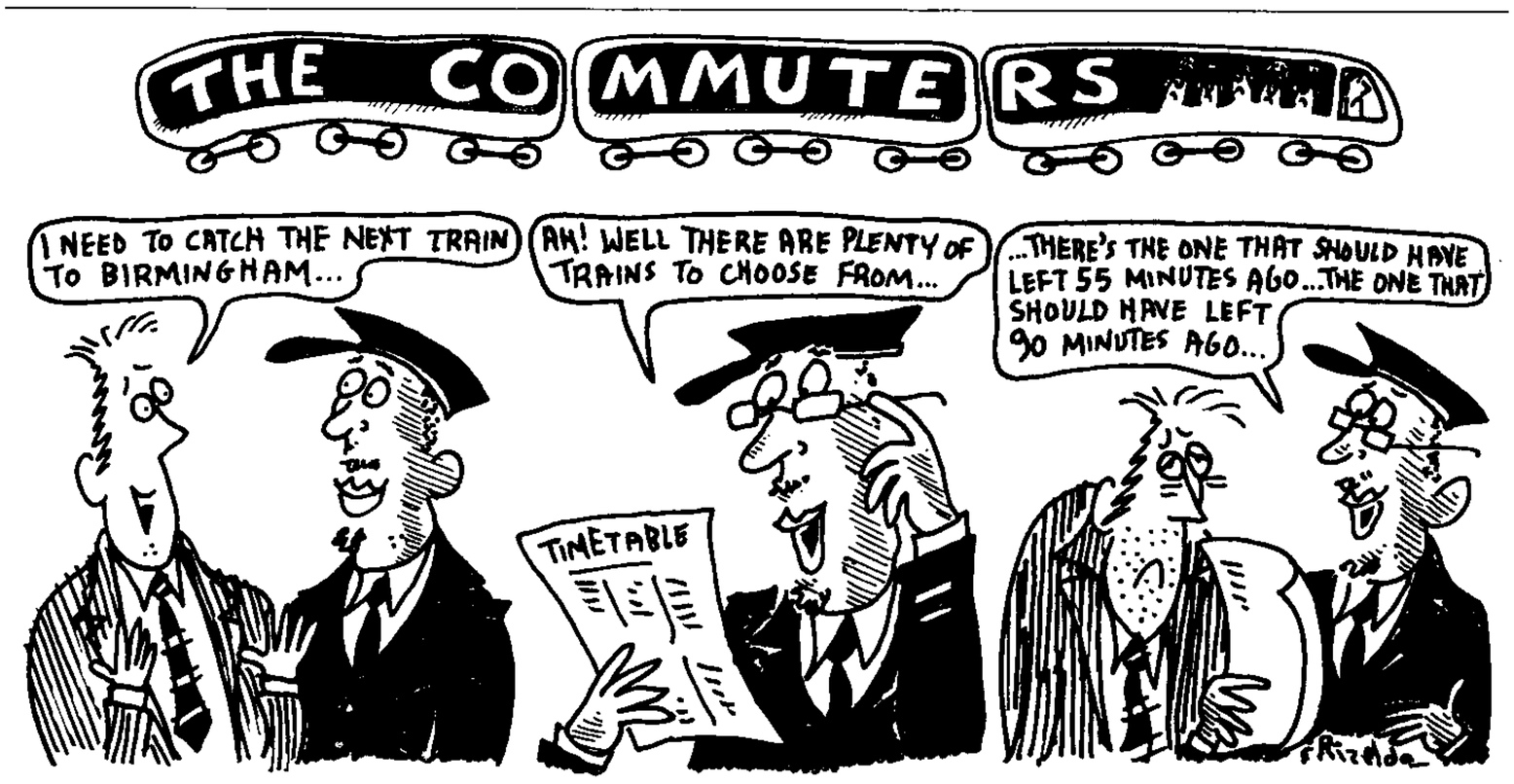
A fortnight later Transport Minister Karen Buck was in Newquay, "delighted" to open the local airport's £2.8m upgrade. The investment, covered entirely by public funds, will cater for "future growth" – ie boost Ryanair and others flying to Newquay from London, Bristol and elsewhere advertising fares "from £0.19".

PS: In 2002 the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution said: "If no limiting action is taken, the rapid growth in air transport will proceed in fundamental contradiction to the government's stated goal of sustainable development. Short-haul passenger flights, such as UK domestic and European journeys, make a disproportionately large contribution to the global environmental impacts of air transport and these impacts are very much larger than those from rail transport."

ONE TRAGEDY of rail privatisation was the turfing out of experienced rail managers, as if tainted by their state-sector past. The new train operators, mostly bus firms, learned that lesson the hard way – except for Go-Ahead Group plc. Most senior managers at state-owned South Eastern Trains have now been told to go away by Go-Ahead, majority partner in the Govia joint venture which won the new Kent franchise. Marching orders were given despite SET's good record, acknowledged by the National Audit Office (*Eye* 1148), in turning around the legacy of sacked operator Connex.

SET's record compares well with Go-Ahead's, which includes a £2m fine for the 1999 Paddington crash (31 deaths). Go-Ahead is a collection of bus firms which bagged the Kent franchise by asking for 1.7 percent less subsidy than its closest rival, knowing the government will bail it out if necessary to avoid disrupting preparations for the all-important "Olympic javelin" trains to Stratford in 2012. Despite a decade of disappointment from rail privatisation, bus-company managers still lord it over people who know how to run a railway.

'Dr B. Ching'


THE COMMUTERS
I NEED TO CATCH THE NEXT TRAIN TO BIRMINGHAM...
AH! WELL THERE ARE PLENTY OF TRAINS TO CHOOSE FROM...
TIMETABLE
...THERE'S THE ONE THAT SHOULD HAVE LEFT 55 MINUTES AGO...THE ONE THAT SHOULD HAVE LEFT 90 MINUTES AGO...

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

DOUG IN DEEP

MORALE is not good at CityWest Homes, the "arms length" company set up in April 2002 to manage Westminster's 22,000 council properties. High among staff gripes is the number of outside consultants who have been brought in, often earning many hundreds of pounds a day.

One such is deputy finance director Doug Hale. In a former life Hale was finance director and then chief executive of Doncaster council. In April 1997 he was suspended in the wake of the district auditor's report on the culture of junketing and expenses fraud that became known as "Donnygate" (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*). Despite having enjoyed foreign freebies himself, and being criticized by auditors for failing to control councillors' expenses, Hale was allowed to take early retirement from his £80,000-a-year job without facing prosecution.

In 2004 a long-delayed disciplinary hearing by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (Cipfa) found Hale guilty of a series of offences, including altering the minutes of a meeting to show approval for an extension of his contract of employment. Cipfa concluded: "Mr Hale's conduct... was dishonest and was intended to mislead." Hale was also criticised by Cipfa for allowing his former wife Rita to buy new computer equipment cheaply from the council (*Eye* 999).

Cipfa concluded: "In the normal course of events, the appropriate sanction would be expulsion or suspension of membership. However, mindful of the time that had elapsed since the matters complained of, the committee ordered that Mr Hale be severely reprimanded."

And therefore free to continue his career at the Conservatives' flagship council.

● MEANWHILE back in Doncaster the recently "restructured" education department has been holding seminars for senior teachers to explain the reorganisation. At one meeting last week, the department's rep heard complaints from teachers about poor communication since the changes. "We don't have a clue what's going on at the council any more," said one. "Neither do we," said the officer. "We get all our information from *Private Eye*." Pip! Pip!

SPARTER-RUCK

STRANGEST bedfellows of the year are a minuscule party of spartists called the Independent Working Class Association (IWCA) and Peter Carter-Ruck and partners, Britain's greediest law firm.

The sparts turned to Carter-Fuck after Oxford city council's deputy leader, Bill Baker, distributed election leaflets last year headlined "Watch out for extremist group". The Labour party in Oxford has been rattled by the IWCA, which has taken three seats off it since 2002. The IWCA claims Labour has betrayed the working class by giving up the fight for justice and equality (whatever could have given them that idea?). Baker's leaflet falsely alleged that the IWCA had links to Irish republican groups and other violent extremists.

After Carter-Fuck was called in, on a no-win, no-fee basis, Labour apologized and coughed up £15,000 – more than enough to cover IWCA's campaign at the May local elections, when it hopes to take another three seats from Labour in Oxford, and will be fielding candidates in the London borough of Islington.

"So you rid the town of rats – big deal. What about the guns, the chavs, the unwanted pregnancies, the graffiti..."

UPSTANDING MEMBER

PITY Matthew Shepherd, a former Lib Dem member of Harlow district council in Essex, whose dedication to the cause of health promotion has brought him nothing but disgrace, ridicule, and a large legal bill.

When Cllr Shepherd downloaded scores of photographs of penises on to his council-issued laptop, it was picked up by the geeks who monitor the use of council computers, and his political career was finished.

Last month he sued the council for £35,000 in the high court, claiming that it had engaged in unlawful "covert surveillance" in breach of the human rights and data protection acts. He had been concerned, he said, as the holder of his party's health portfolio, that free condoms given away by the council might not fit the men of Essex properly, as they conformed to a standard size determined by the EU without sufficient research. He had therefore taken it upon himself to inspect as many dicks as possible in order to get a better idea of average size. Tough job... but someone's got to do it.

Unfortunately Judge Bradbury ruled that this was a load of, er, balls, and kicked out Shepherd's claim. He now faces a legal bill of around £20,000 – his sole consolation being a nomination for Rotten Boroughs' brass-necked councillor of the year award.

SKINT FLINT

TROUBLED Flintshire county council has provided easy pickings for Manchester property developer Alex Hamilton.

His company Courtford Ltd bought a former bus depot and an adjacent plot near Mold town centre from the Labour council for just £1.1m. Within months he had sold the site on to Homebase for £3.5m – a tidy profit of £2.4m. Council taxpayers were not impressed by this, given that hard-up Flintshire was recently forced to cut services and 101 jobs to remedy a £6m shortfall. The council says it got "above the market valuation" for the land. But as everyone knows, the value of land changes dramatically once it has planning permission.

On 15 February 2003 Hamilton's company, Courtford, entered into a conditional contract with the council. This made clear that Hamilton would only pay the asking price if he got outline planning permission for the land; it was also conditional on letting the site to a large retail development. He put down a 5 percent deposit on what for him was a cast-iron banker.

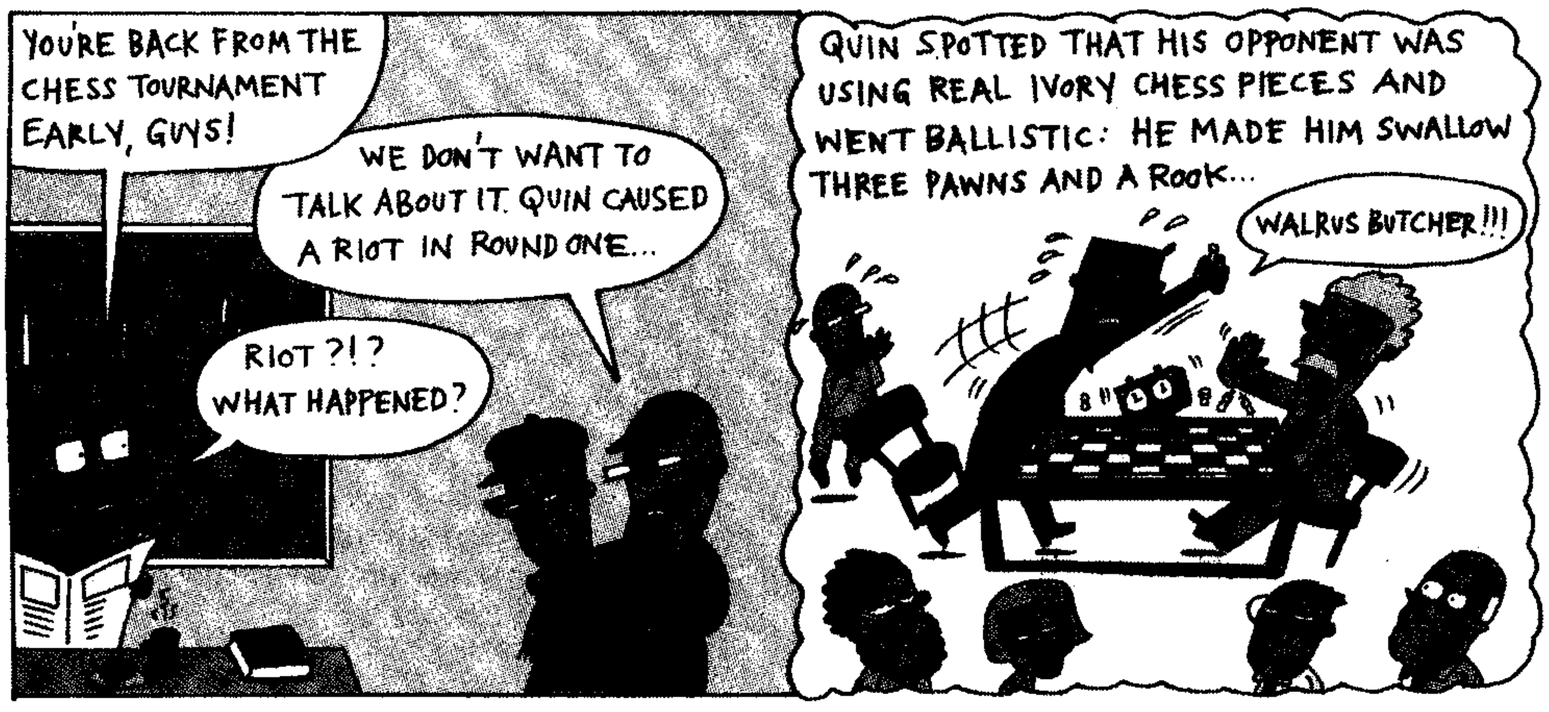
At this stage even the guy in charge of paperclips at Shire Hall in Mold might have realised that the land was going to be developed and that its value would be going up drastically. But the council still failed to maximise its income.

Private Eye has seen an internal email from a council estates officer called Peter Rice, raising his concerns about the deal. In October 2004 Hamilton wanted to extend the conditional contract, which effectively locked out other bidders. Rice revealed: "There is another party interested in a residential development and as this is at a higher figure we need to consider the respective merits and I am not inclined to agree an automatic extension." Hamilton wanted the extension to his contract because he hadn't got the finances together for the full purchase, nor had he got a big retailer for the site. He wanted more time – and he got it when Rice was over-ruled, the higher bidder was ignored and the deal went through in spring 2005. Within months the land had trebled in value.

Opposition councillors have forced an investigation by the council's monitoring officer and external auditor Price-WaterhouseCooper has been called in. Will the carpets at Flintshire CC be wide enough for all the things that need to be swept under them?

● ANOTHER council maximising income from selling off assets is Sunderland. The city council announced last week that it was attempting to raise £5.2m by flogging old school buildings and, of course, playing fields. The council has made a good start. It recently sold a row of shops and flats in Beaumont Street, Southwick, to the Sunderland Housing Group (SHG) housing association (*Eyes passim*) for the grand sum of £1. The council's head of property, Angela Etherington, explained that the knock-down price was because the SHG had taken on responsibility for compensating the shop tenants. The *Eye* understands, however, that this compensation will be nowhere near the estimated £250,000 the site is worth.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON — KNIFE & PACKER


YOU'RE BACK FROM THE CHESS TOURNAMENT EARLY, GUYS!
WE DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT. QUIN CAUSED A RIOT IN ROUND ONE...
RIOT ?!? WHAT HAPPENED?
QUIN SPOTTED THAT HIS OPPONENT WAS USING REAL IVORY CHESS PIECES AND WENT BALLISTIC: HE MADE HIM SWALLOW THREE PAWNS AND A ROOK...
WALRUS BUTCHER!!!

HIGH PRINCIPALS

SINCE announcing a £4m hole in its finances in 2004, the University of Sussex has been busy making redundancies and other cutbacks to achieve the necessary savings.

Now it has announced that it is to axe its chemistry degree, halve the chemistry department's staff and rename it "chemical biology". Grim times indeed.

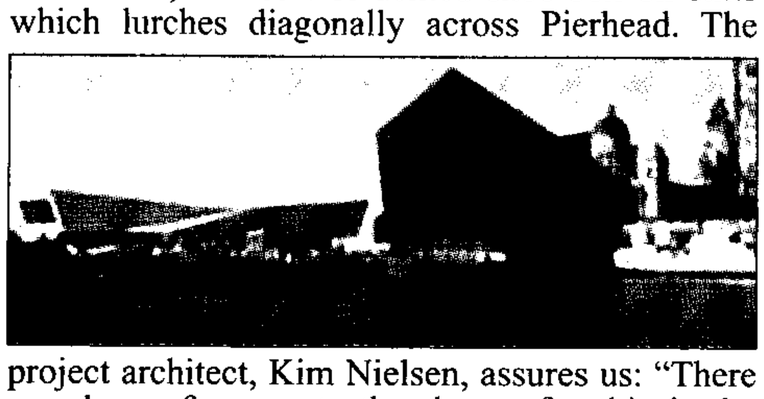
So a Vagina Festival was obviously just what everyone needed. Including a "vagina painting workshop" and a "female ejaculation workshop" alongside the expected lectures on feminism and poetry readings, the "V-Day" events – actually running for a whole week at the beginning of March – were part of Sussex university's programme of diversity events.

NOOKS and CORNERS

LIVERPOOL, having been made European City of Culture for 2008, seems gripped by a manic frenzy; its councillors desperate to acquire as many "iconic" buildings as possible and approve any and every development proposal. They seem to regard the Euro-accolade as a licence to pursue the redevelopment of the city that merciful poverty formerly inhibited. Never mind heritage; never mind culture! Yet many Liverpudlians do; together with those who care about the city's architecture.

First there was the "Cloud" or so-called "Fourth Grace" proposed for Pierhead, a ridiculous coloured blob on stilts designed by the egregious Will Alsop. When that proved as expensive and impractical as it was hideous, it was dropped, only to have the council come up with a new Museum of Liverpool right on the waterfront between the existing, and magnificent, Edwardian "Three Graces" and the Albert Dock – the stupendous and now flourishing group of warehouses which Liverpool tried for decades to destroy until it was saved by Michael Heseltine.

Icons are, of course, nothing if not exciting, so the museum, designed by the Danish architects 3XNielsen, is a sort of dented shoe-box on stilts which lurches diagonally across Pierhead. The



project architect, Kim Nielsen, assures us: "There are clear references to the shape of a ship in the exterior design of the building, in tribute to the city's maritime heritage." What sort of a ship is not clear. But he helpfully explains the reality of "iconic" architecture: "It is an abstract interpretation of a ship really – it's a big sculpture, it's a piece of art, not just a museum, and it will be there for everyone to enjoy whether they go inside or not."

Needless to say the Museum of Liverpool project is supported by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and by supine English Heritage. But others are not so sure. The Heritage Lottery Fund has declined to give a grant of £11.4m towards the contents of the museum, while ICOMOS-UK, which advises UNESCO, considers the Pierhead location totally unsuitable for this crude and naïve gesture since in 2004 it was made a World Heritage Site.

ICOMOS warned that it would call for a public inquiry if planning permission were granted – which it now has been. But with characteristic arrogance, Liverpool doesn't care: "It may look a bit different, but isn't that what architecture's about?" insists Warren Bradley, council leader. "Let's be more inventive and modern… It's about learning to live with change and modernisation. We are living in the 21st century, after all."

Not content with spoiling Pierhead utterly, Liverpool is now ready to grant planning permission for a commercial development of three new buildings behind the proposed museum, on a site known as Mann Island, which will block the dramatic view of the Three Graces from the Albert Dock. This is a £112m scheme by Neptune Developments and Countryside Properties for 109,000 square feet of offices along the Strand, lots of "leisure and retail space" at ground level and 373 flats in two buildings. These residential blocks will not be boringly rectangular but will have exciting sloping sides and awkward angles to harmonise with the dented shoe box nextdoor. Such is iconic architecture. The architects are Broadway Malyan, an international firm with offices all over the place which, we are told, produces "award-winning" buildings. CABE loves these proposals, as does English Heritage.

What is so depressing is the vapid notion that new architecture has to be assertive, unusual, strident and exhibitionistic rather than thoughtful, contextual and useful. It is now clear that the worst fate that can befall a place is to be made City of Culture.

IT IS not just Liverpool that is at risk. With a government that loves property developers and despises the past, with a mayor obsessed with having tall buildings, and with English Heritage having been squeezed and demoralised by the philistine Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell, London is suffering a frenzy of destruction unthinkable a decade ago.

The Guinness Brewery at Park Royal is being demolished (Eye 1134), although the splendid brick brewery buildings by Sir Giles Scott which only occupy a small part of the development site (and which are only not listed because of a disgraceful misuse of a certificate of immunity from listing by the owners, Messrs Diageo, and Brent Council) would be converted and reused in any civilized city. Then the solid, beautifully made and elegant New Change buildings in the City of London, which would be retained at least on environmental and sustainability grounds in a sane society, is to be replaced by a posturing icon by the French pseud, Jean Nouvel.

And now, with the complacent acquiescence of English Heritage, the celebrated landmark chimneys of Battersea Power Station, the first great temple of power by, again, the great Sir Giles Scott, are to come down. Parkview International, the Hong Kong-based developer which has presided over the neglect of the listed building for a dozen years, has rejected expert advice that the reinforced concrete chimneys can be repaired in situ and insist they must be replaced. Is there any guarantee that, once demolished, they will be rebuilt in replica (rather than leaving the power station as a derelict brick lump, ripe for demolition)? Why, no.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY
£1·6m APPEAL
KEEP THIS PAINTING IN BRITAIN!
Huh! All that money for a boring old portrait of some poet no-one's heard of!
Donne!
They have been!
And not by us!

I-SPY

Luton Airport

Submitted by Anon. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

NO DOUBT Tessa Jowell has other things on her mind right now. But if the culture secretary can spare a thought during her now lonely breakfasts in Kentish Town, she might direct it toward the off-the-rails behaviour of her Number 2 at the DCMS: the fiercely ambitious David Lammy.

As already noted in this column, Lammy has developed a high-handed, pull-your-socks-up line in lecturing the arts world on its shortcomings – usually accompanied by darkly thuggish threats. Only a few weeks ago he was warning orchestras and other cultural institutions that if they didn't increase the number of "black minority workers" on their books, they'd find their funding cut – a demand that sent orchestral managements into panic as they battled with the idea that they are now, for the sake of political correctness, obliged to field a certain percentage of black players on every concert platform regardless of the players' musical abilities.

Now Lammy has caused comparable havoc with a speech to the Association of British Orchestras' annual conference which included an all-out attack on the Arts Council of England. Delegates were astonished to hear him tear the ACE apart on the grounds that it wasn't providing leadership, that it had lost its way, and that it needed overall reform. But no one was more astonished than the council itself – with the result that relations between the ACE and DCMS are close to breakdown.

ACE's chairman, Sir Christopher Frayling, has publicly dismissed the attack as "off-centre" and "misguided". Privately, his comments about Lammy have been richer in their colouring. And the undeniable fact is that Lammy's motor-mouth assault came out of the blue, with no apparent support from Tessa Jowell or from a recent peer review of ACE which was broadly favourable. So it may be that, as many in the council hope, the whole incident can be dismissed as the braying of an ill-informed MP out for media profile.

Ill-informed or otherwise, Lammy spells danger for the ACE. His speech dropped heavy hints that if it isn't careful it could find itself in the same position as the Scottish Arts Council (now officially abolished) and the Welsh (currently being squeezed to extinction). Political will in Britain seems to be for government to cast aside its arms-length role in funding for the arts and seize direct responsibility. But everybody knows that doesn't look good. So it will be interesting to see if Tessa Jowell finds time to step in and support her minister or leave him mouthing empty threats.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

British Tuba Concertos
Gourlay; Royal Ballet Sinfonia; Sutherland
This, seemingly the most comical of instruments, shows itself to having great emotional depths in this enervating collection.
Britannia Records

Letters

Cover girl

Sir,

Please allow me to congratulate the Eye for so accurately predicting the argument Tessa Jowell used in defending herself on the cover of your last issue (Eye 1153).

Regards,
DIPAK GHOSH,

Stirling, Scotland.

Nuff said?

Sir,

Your advertisement TESSA ACCOUNT is brilliant – could not resist copying (in breach of copyright) and showing to the unconverted.

I am, however, very uncomfortable with Glenda's continued references to Mrs Oaten (an innocent party if ever there was one) whose only fault (?) is to stand (with the children) by her husband.

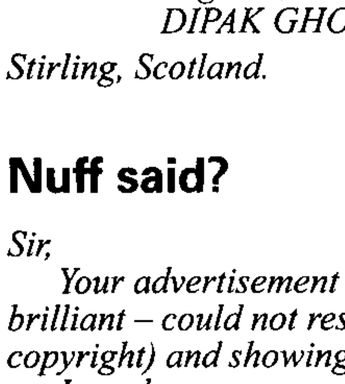
It savours of sadism – it's not cricket; it's not British.

Enough is enough. The point has been made.

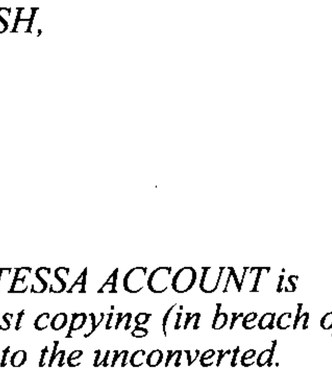
Sincerely,
DON ROBERTS,

The Wirral.

Lookalike



Haniyeh



Clooney

Sir,

You cannot have missed the extraordinary resemblance between George Clooney, spokesman for the International Terrorist Group "Hamish", and Ismail Haniyeh, the actor condemned by all civilised nations for his role in the new Hollywood blockbuster, Sorryana? Are they perhaps related?

MICHAEL KRUSE,

Nagoya, Japan.

Foot and mouthpiece

Sir,

Re: Foot and Mouth, Eye 1153. Muckspreader revisits this topic (how many times?) and you have an editorial on the matter. But I am concerned that the general public are left with an erroneous impression about F&M.

Firstly, it is widely thought to be a deadly disease, which it is not. Animals do recover. It is, however, highly infectious and does affect milk production. Secondly, the impression is given that the culling policy is imposed on reluctant farmers by an authoritarian government. My understanding is that, when there was a particularly severe outbreak in the 1920s, the dairy industry prevailed upon that government to institute a slaughter policy and that successive governments have followed that policy on each subsequent outbreak, with substantial compensation from public funds.

There might be criticisms of the application of this policy on particular occasions but that is another matter.

KEN HOLMES,

Lower Dunsforth, York.

Needled over MMR

Sir,

How nice to see Lord Gnome commending the Prince of Wales for his support of vaccination as a means of controlling foot and mouth disease (Eye 1153). As you quite rightly say, he was indeed pleading with the PM to "listen to the scientists with genuine knowledge" of the disease and to ignore the scaremongers. Is there any chance that Your Lordship might apply the same sort of reasoning to your perverse (not to say criminally insane) attitude to MMR vaccine?

Yours,
ROGER A. FISKEN,

Bedale, N. Yorks.

Damn statistics

Sir,

The famous statistic uttered by expert witness Roy Meadow – of a "probability" of one in 73 million of two cot deaths in a family – was obvious nonsense as applied. It was indeed evidence (provided that innocent cot death really is a purely random occurrence) that the deaths did not occur randomly. It gives no other indication. It is worrying that no judge, advocate, witness or juror grasped this simple truth. Or were they all overawed by the claimed authority of Sir Roy? Perhaps murder was the only alternative any of them could think of; medical causes for infant death? No, forget it.

JOHN WHEAVER,

Milton Keynes.

Knight's tale

Sir,

In his letter "Perfect Knight" (Eye 1153), Jim Tompkins justifies Jim Knight MP's support for the Weymouth Relief Road as Mr Knight simply keeping an election promise. That is hardly the point.

On 29 June last year, Mr Knight, in his role as Forestry Minister, launched the Forestry Commission's major new policy on ancient and native woodland – a key aim of which is to reverse the decline in the amount of England's ancient and native woodland.

It is strange then that the Weymouth Relief Road, which he so strongly supports, will damage and destroy ancient and native woodland. Surely that makes Mr Knight a worthy target for your scorn?

Yours in anticipation of a paper-free, electronic, subscription one of these days...

STAN BLACKLEY,

Edinburgh.

Loud railer

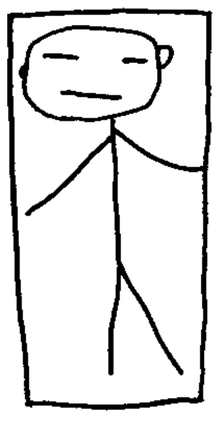
Sir,

Sorry but it's Clive Digger (Eye 1153), not Anna Lomax (Eye 1151) who is mistaken about the word "crescendo". By no means does it refer to "the loudest or most intense point reached". The word Mr Digger is, er, groping for is "climax".

Yours eye,
JULIAN THAKE,

Worcester.

IVOR CUTLER
1923-2006

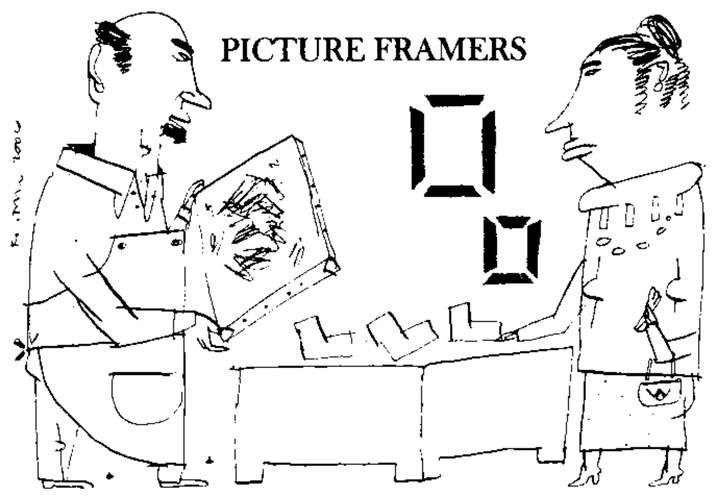


KNIFESMITH'S CORNER

When I am dead, I shan't be able to see if people are remembering me.

Private Eye 1962

Scenes You Seldom See



"You want expert advice? This picture is rubbish. Don't waste my time"

Acting Tory

Sir,

Further to Remote Controller's comments on actor Adam Rickitt's appearance on Question Time, I seem to recall an article in a Daily Torygraph diary column on the subject of Rickitt's acceptance by the Tories as a future candidate for parliament. At no time during Question Time was this mentioned (when his name appeared on the screen he was described only as an "Actor"); and given the ex-Coronation Street strutter's sucking up to the Tory MP present and obvious right-wing tendencies (although I am not sure if the Conservatives are even right-leaning anymore), it's pretty disturbing if these things are allowed to go on without some kind of check. Next thing you know Bob Geldof will be advising the Tories on policy matters... Oh wait, hasn't this already happened? Mind you, what with all the gay affairs, cross-dressing and love-children, parliament would probably seem like a home from home to anyone who has ever appeared on The Street, and no doubt vice versa.

Yours,
FRED COLLIER,

Dorset.

Sir,

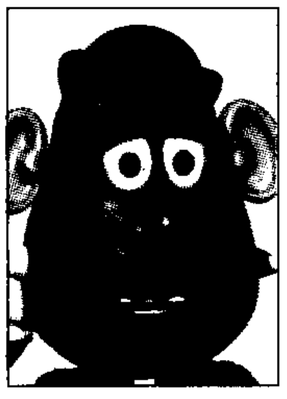
Are we to understand from Andrew Collins (Letters, 1153) that the fact that Adam Rickitt attended private schools ("Kingsmead Prep, Sedburgh School") makes him more qualified to be a Question Time panellist than the rest of us state-educated rabble, who may or may not have been approved as a prospective parliamentary candidate? If not, why is Rickitt's school history of any bearing to the discussion?

Yours,
CAROL WALTER,

Kendal, Cumbria.

Lookalike

Mr Potato Head



ElBaradei

Sir,

Has anyone else noticed the extraordinary resemblance between Dr Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the UN nuclear weapons inspectorate, and Mr Potato Head, from Pixar's Toy Story? Could they be in some way related? I think we should be told...

MATT BELL,

Cambridgeshire.

Too Remote by half?

Sir,

Remote Controller? Remote Viewer more like! "The Real Rain Man" just another autistic savant documentary and the title lazy labelling? Kim Peek was the person the Rain Man screenwriter and Dustin Hoffman used as research. He was the Real Rain Man!

Mr Hoffman encouraged Mr Peek to tour his savant talents and after two decades of that his personal skills have improved dramatically, a direct result of the film's footprint. With his 80-year-old father-cum-carer Mr Peek wanted an up-to-date medical analysis of things; the last time was as a child when it was suggested he be locked away and forgotten. So the documentary had every right to be made, at precisely the time it was made, and to use that title.

To fix that it was too long I'd have liked to have been reassured that Mr Peek's longer-term care is in hand and why Ch5 put it on at 11pm, the porning hour, was odd. So there's a review of it to inform Remote's glib comments – happy to help.

Yours,
MUIR MCCORMICK,

Erskine.

Lookalike

Blakey

Jowell

Sir,

Is Tessa Jowell perhaps related to "Blakey" of "On The Buses"? I think she should declare it.

HUGH ALEXANDER,

Bloxham, Oxfordshire.

Invisible man

Sir,

You are quite right to advise people to watch the "Animated World Faiths" series, which is an excellent introduction to the lives and teachings of important religious figures. You fail to mention, however, why the episode "The Life of Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)" has never caused offence. As is explained to viewers at the start, the Prophet is not shown at all. The cartoon concentrates on the reactions of his friends to the events of his life. It is a very good way to get young students discussing different ways of showing respect and reasons for these traditions.

Yours faithfully,
LIZ GREY,

Head of Religious Education, Birkenhead School.

PS: You can't spell "Buddha".

I'll read that again

Sir,

As an ex-editor of the BMJ it seems Richard Smith cannot read articles. In my edition of Private Eye, it mentioned that "United has been accused of using confidential patient data it received as part of these contracts to secure its GP bids – a claim it denies". Yet Richard Smith's letter says this was an assertion. Perhaps he needs to learn to read again.

PETER BARLOW
(who graduated at Edinburgh in the same year as Richard Smith),

Via email.

Cat letter

Sir,

Edition number 1153 of your organ contains on page 17 a witty illustration for the Funny Old World column by Victor Lewis-Smith. We are enormously touched that the basis for the illustration is the logo and general style of our editions of Debussy's music – a copy of a "genuine" version is enclosed for your reference – and we consider it a badge of honour for this to have appeared in your pages.

There is always a danger of an apparent lapse of sense of humour under these circumstances, but this would be far from the case here. However, it is a fact that if one fails to defend one's trademark – something that is very important to us and our business – then its validity is weakened in law. So, while very much enjoying its modified appearance on your organ, we think we'd better ask you to obtain a retrospective licence for this usage.

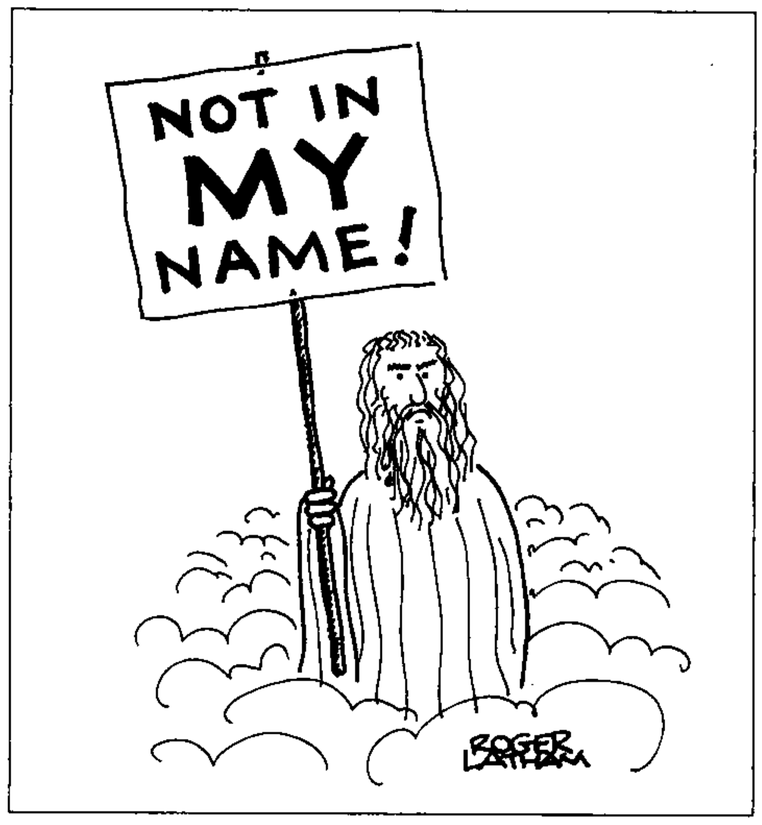
We think the right cost of such a licence to yourselves would be a nominal sum of £1,000, and would be grateful if you would confirm your acceptance of this. We would then issue the licence on receipt of your cheque.

Thank you for brightening our day, as you have so often done in the past.

Yours faithfully,
NICHOLAS RIDDLE,

Managing Director, Edition Peters.

● Mr Riddle is referred to the *Eye*'s reply in the famous case of Pressdram v. Arkell. Ed.



Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"People were looking around like headless chickens..."

DEWI MORRIS, Sky Sports
(Gary Newman)

"He [Jermaine Pennant] just needs to screw his loaf."

STEVE BRUCE, Radio 5 Live
(Paul Whalley)

"Let me throw something into the boiling point here..."

RAY STUBBS, BBC Soccer Interactive
(Steve Rance)

"The British team will need to pull their socks out."

STEVE CRAM, BBC
(Mike Aylmer)

"He's a cat on hot tin bricks."

CHRISTOPHER MARTIN-JENKINS, Radio 4
(Malcolm Quick)

SOLUTIONS

"Blackbaud: need a constituent relationship management solution that can take care of itself?" – *database*

"Relocation solutions: Solstice Park offers a diverse range of property solutions for local, national and international organisations" – *industrial estate*

"Tompla would like to take this opportunity to offer you a fast and effective envelope solution" – *envelopes*

"Alphameric, the provider of end to end solutions for the Leisure and Hospitality sectors, announces that Enterprise Inns will implement Alphameric Hospitality division's Sales Order Capture Solution for its entire pub estate" – *tills*

All submitted by readers

Barking

Sir,

Re: True Stories, Eye 1153, pets and music.

Our family has gone to town on composers liked by pets. Cats like, as well as Depussy: Purrcell, Miowzart and Mouse-orgsky. Our late collie cross quite liked Bach, but her favourite composer was Offenbach.

Yours truly,
RUTH GRIMSLEY,

Via email.

Roman games

Sir,

It appears your cartoonist RGJ has never visited the Eternal City – and if he has, he clearly didn't go sightseeing.

The Roman landmark illustrated in Richard Jolley's characteristically witty cartoon (Eye 1153) is the COLOSSEUM. The name on the foreground hoarding, however, belongs to a West End venue not known for hosting the kind of barbaric sports now seen only in city centre streets on Saturday nights.

Readers should be informed that, other than the public entertainment link, the two buildings are in no way related.

I intend to organise a protest outside Private Eye's offices, where I will demand the cartoonist's public execution for this unforgivable cultural insult.

Throw him to the lions...

DAVID T. PALMER,

Via email.

Just a Mo...

Sir,

If you can't show Mohamed with a bomb on his head, can you show Mohamed with a bee in his bonnet?

Yours faithfully,
ROGER LATHAM,

Coleford.

Frictional town

Sir,

Re Dumb Ireland (Eye 1153). Er, what **is** *the name of the fictional town in which Coronation Street is set?*

Yours,
LOL LAVERTY,

Via email.

● Weatherfield. Do keep up. Ed.

Letter from **Iran**

from Our Own Correspondent

ACCORDING to the polls, Iran is now the country Americans consider their greatest enemy. But while the West frets about our president's virulent attacks on Israel and our referral to the UN Security Council over our nuclear ambitions, there is another Iran struggling to be heard.

We have one of the most youthful and educated populations in the Middle East: 70 percent are under 30, with national literacy rates well over 90 percent; and last year more than 65 percent of those entering university were women. It is these educated youth who are increasingly finding expression through weblogs. And what they say may surprise you.

Our post-revolution baby boom was celebrated by Ayatollah Khomeini who reckoned that a country whose youth were ready for martyrdom "*could never* be destroyed". Though the population has more than doubled since 1979 to almost 70 million, the master-plan hasn't worked. Not every young Iranian wants to die in *jihad*. Far from it.

As a nation we may be personified by archive footage of us screaming "Death to America and Israel!" during Friday prayers. But according to our Ministry of Culture and Guidance, fewer than 1.4 percent of us actually attends Friday prayers. Spend any time in the Iranian blogosphere, and you find a similar discrepancy between appearance and reality during the recent furore over the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed.

When protests were said to be "raging across the Muslim world", news items in the west linked speculation about our nuclear goals with pictures of crazy demonstrators throwing petrol-bombs and stones at the Danish embassy in Tehran. True, the demonstration happened; and equally true, ordinary Iranian Muslims may well have been dismayed by images of their prophet dressed as a terrorist. But the overwhelming majority of Tehran's 12 million citizens were *not* alight with rage.

A crowd of just 400 attacked the Danish embassy in the north of the city. And among the rent-a-mob protesters was Basij (militia) member and blogger Saleh Meftah, who described (pasokhgooee.persianblog.com) the thrill and fun-filled atmosphere of the attack, posting smug photos of himself inside the embassy compound.

When the story of his escapades was then written up on Roozonline, a popular Iranian internet news daily, recounting how Saleh had described preparations and naming members of the Student Basij, his exploits were repeatedly and vociferously condemned.

Normally on the streets of Tehran only the brave or mad would dare confront a member of the Basij. But in cyberspace over two days, hundreds of angry comments were left on Saleh's page, criticising him and his goons. Here is a selection:

"I cannot hide my hatred of you and your actions. It's your bestial breed that give Westerners cause to insult our dear prophet and faith…"

"You've written here that, as you read the comments, 'I am proud that the enemies of the revolution are attacking me'. Listen you godless fool… What enemies!! They are ordinary people who are telling you how they feel… your fellow countrymen!!!!"

"You, Basij, just don't learn… But I also want to say that I commend you for not deleting the messages here and for upholding the democratic principle of free speech. This is all we want: to be allowed to speak out and not to be beaten to death for it…"

A few days after the attack, there was a very different protest at the embassy. Hossein Nouri, a disabled war veteran who lost both his hands in the Iran-Iraq war, was pushed in a wheelchair to the gates where, paintbrush in mouth, he painted an accomplished portrait of the Virgin Mary to "show the Iranian nation's respect for other faiths".

As Washington cranks up its anti-Iranian rhetoric, it is worth remembering that not all us Iranians are like Saleh and chums.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "The real mystery isn't who the thieves are," Chip Franklin told listeners to his WBAL radio show in Baltimore, "it's why it took so long for this type of crime to reach our city. Scrap metal prices have tripled over the past two years, and our criminals have finally realised that ripping up lampposts and shipping them abroad is an easy way to make money. That's why the lights are going out all across Baltimore."

Commenting on the theft of hundreds of nine-metre-tall aluminium lampposts from the city, Franklin noted that such crimes are becoming widespread. "China's voracious demand for scrap metal has sent global prices soaring, and thieves are making off with just about anything they can lay their hand on, from phone booths and railway lines to traffic lights and street signs. We've even had Zimmer frames taken from hospital store rooms. Baltimore isn't alone though. In Pittsburgh recently, 400 parking meters were yanked from the roadside. Montreal lost 30 manhole covers last spring, and Belgium's main railway station had 770 luggage carts stolen. The problem is even worse in China though. Last year, 24,000 manhole covers were stolen in Beijing alone, and eight people died after falling into open sewers as a result.

"What does this crime say about our society? Think how badly we're losing the war on drugs if crack addicts are cutting down the city's lampposts and selling them, just to get a fix." *(The Stalwart, 10/2/06. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*

– ● –

● *"In this country, educators quite rightly put a strong emphasis on the importance of practising safe sex, but the extra risk for brace wearers and their partners often gets forgotten. Sexually active teenagers who wear braces should think carefully before they and their partners engage in oral sex. Metal braces can easily scratch genital areas, while brace brackets could tear delicate mouth tissues when kissing. Also, a small hole in a condom could occur without either party noticing, exposing partners to HIV risks.*

"According to the NHS, over a quarter of people under the age of 16 are sexually active, while the number of teenagers wearing braces has tripled in the past 20 years. Additionally, more people are now wearing braces into their late teens and early twenties, making the sexual health risks even more relevant. We would therefore like to see the dangers posed by braces covered by teachers during sex education classes." – Dr Nigel Carter, Chief Executive, British Dental Health Foundation. (BDHF press release, 30/11/05. Spotter: Roger Sykes)

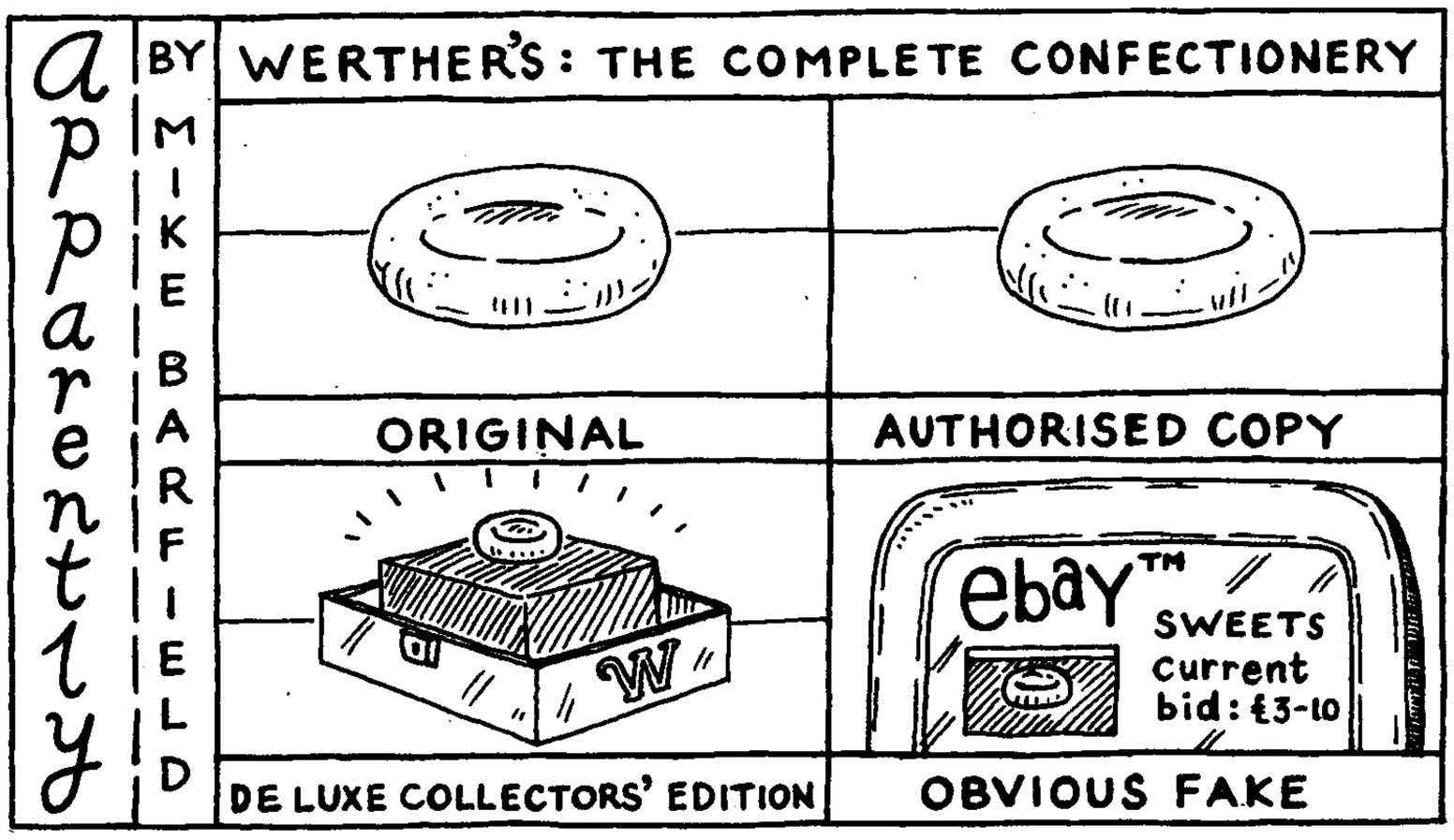
– ● –

● "I am not a pervert," forty-one-year-old Sharon Tendler told journalists in the Israeli resort of Eilat, "I am the happiest girl on earth. I love this dolphin, and marrying him has made a dream come true. It's something that we've done because I love him, but not in the way that you love a man. It's a pure love that I have for this animal. It's wholesome and not a bad thing."

Tendler, who was wearing a white bridal dress with pink flowers for the ceremony,

explained how she had fallen for her male bottlenosed husband (named Cindy), while visiting the Eilat dolphin reef. "The love, peace and tranquillity I felt when I was underwater with him made me calm, so I kept returning. And after several visits, I realised that I wanted to marry Cindy. I approached his trainer, Maya Zilber, and asked for permission, and Maya talked the idea over with Cindy, who consented. Once we are married, I'll stay with him for ever. I'm strictly a one-dolphin woman."

After entering the water, Tendler kissed the dolphin on the beak. The ceremony was sealed by spectators tossing mackerel into the water, after which the couple swam away. *(Yediot Ahronot, 29/12/05. Spotter: J. Kirkbride)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

And I know a lot of you will have been listening at 6 o'clock in the morning last week to Mike Parkinson's very popular show on St Albion's Hospital Radio, 'Hi there bedblockers!'. As you will have noticed, it was a pretty tough interview, as it always is with Mike!

He really puts you through your paces, and you have to be on your toes, remembering all your best anecdotes and jokes!

But many of you have been kind enough to email and text the vicarage, to tell me that I was pretty brilliant, and that if ever I'm out of a job (which I won't be, Gordon, so don't get too excited!) then I could walk straight into Mike's seat in the studio!

For those of you who didn't hear it, the highlight of the show had to be when Mike asked me what was my favourite colour! This was a perfect cue for me to explain why I thought I would be proved right in everything I have preached about our great crusade against the Evil One in Iraq.

I hope you don't mind if I quote myself here, but it would be difficult to put it better!

TONY: *"Hey it's not up to me to judge whether I'm right or not. I leave that to history and to God, and frankly, I'm pretty confident I know what both of them are going to say!*

You remember that famous quote from the Good Book 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant'? (Justifications, 9.11).

Well, I'm not saying that those will be the exact words which greet me on Judgement Day, but I wouldn't mind betting that they will be pretty similar!"

Anyway, you can see that the point I was trying to make was that it's not up to human beings to judge something as important as our Great Crusade against what the Rev. Dubya likes to call the 'terrorification of eviltude'.

And that particularly includes all those parishioners of St Albion who have been far too quick to 'play God', by passing judgement on me themselves.

Look, it's not a picnic doing this job as the vicar of the parish. You have to take tough decisions, such as whether or not to support the Rev. Dubya and the Church of the Latter Day Morons – and decisions like that don't come easy!

No wonder Sister Condy has to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning, to do her exercises and meditation in preparation for the hard day ahead!

I myself have had many sleepless nights, wrestling with my conscience about whether to answer the telephone when I know it's going to be the Rev. Dubya ringing up to ask if I've said my

prayers!

Don't get me wrong! I in no way resent the fact that I've probably got the hardest job in the world!

All I'm saying to those who wish to criticise is that, frankly, it's none of their business, and they should leave it to the experts, i.e. God, to decide that everything I've done was right after all!

Yours

God *(Is this right? Ed.)*

IMPORTANT NOTICE

CONGRATULATIONS to Mrs Hewitt for her brilliant initiative in reducing all waiting lists at the St Albion's Community Hospital to zero. She has achieved this remarkable target by closing the hospital down. Well done, Patricia! You're a great example to others!

The collection at this week's Evening Service will go towards paying off our Cottage Hospital small deficit of £1.2 billion. T.B.

Thought For The Week

THE FLIGHT OUT OF BRITAIN INTO EGYPT

"Render unto Dubya those people which are Dubya's"

(Book of Renditions, 7.3)

Let's all take these words to heart and stop criticising the Vicar for following this commandment, shall we? T.B.

Their Special Day!!

The vicar was delighted to officiate at the special Service of Temporary Separation for his good friend Mrs Jowell and Mr Mills. In his moving address, Tony said that untying the knot was always a difficult decision to make, and it wasn't to be entered into lightly. He wanted to commend Tessa and David for the mature and civilised way in which they had come to their decision, motivated only by a desire to save the vicar any embarrassment and to enable Tessa to keep her job in charge of the new casino in the vestry. The vicar spoke briefly on the unimportance of holy matrimony in the modern era, and said he felt sure that the unhappy couple would soon be reunited once the dust had settled and we had all moved on.

The vicar read from the Epistle to the Roman Prosecuting Magistrates, including the famous text 'Greater love hath no woman than this: she should lay down her husband for her job'.

At a reception in the vicarage afterwards, tea and refreshments were served by the Matrons of Dishonour – Mrs Beckett, Mrs Jay and Mrs Blears. the Separation cake was ceremonially cut by Mrs Jowell (who was delighted to find inside it a file on her husband compiled by the Serious Fraud Office!)

Tessa leads the congregation in an impromptu sing-song on the vicarage lawn, Everyone joined in for that rousing hymn by St Tammy of Wynette: 'Don't Stand by Your Man'!

SCANDAL MINISTER NOT DEAD

by Christine Keeler

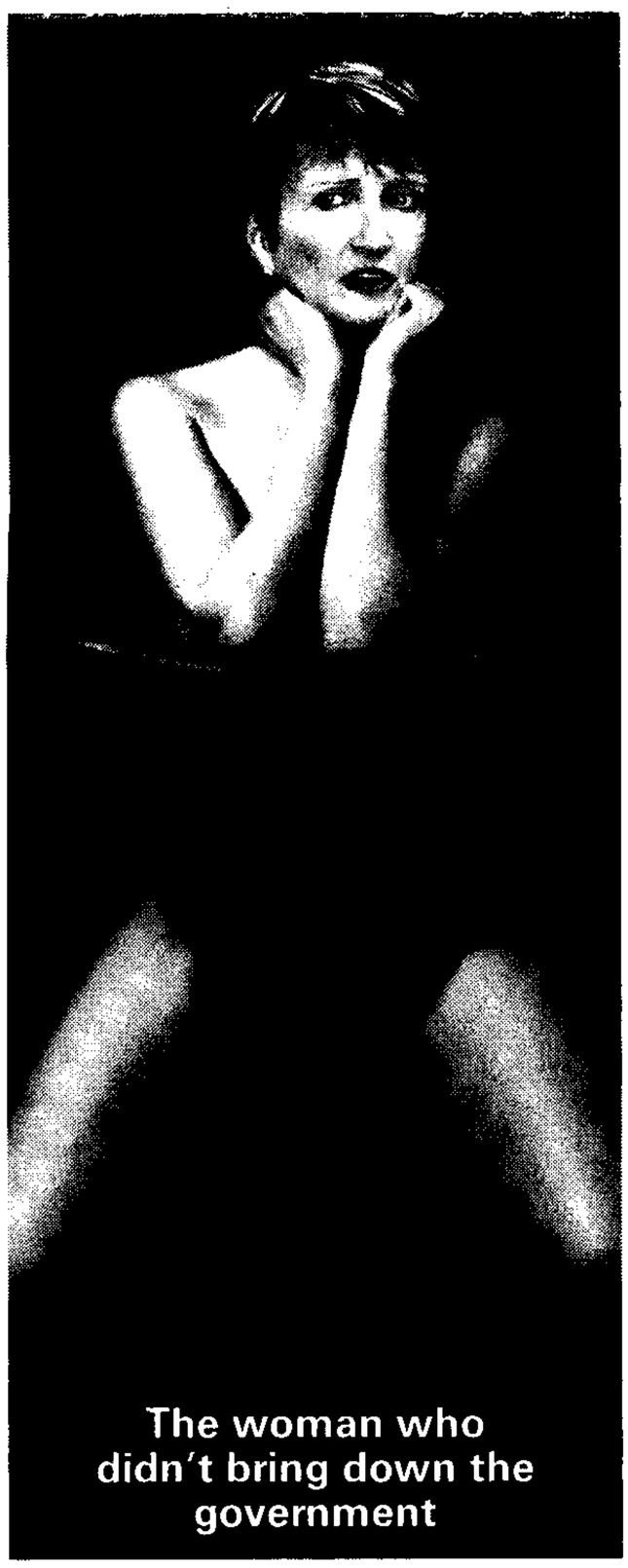
THE events of nearly 14 days ago dramatically resurfaced with the news that the figure at the centre of the biggest scandal to rock British politics since the 1960s has not died.

For days the nation held its breath as the scandal was revealed – how David Mills had enjoyed a brief marriage to gorgeous pouting cabinet minister Tessa Jowell, but had all the time been in bed with Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian Prime Minister.

Profumo what a scorcher

As the tale of sleaze and scandal engulfed the beleaguered Tory government, the cabinet minister at the centre of the storm stood up in the House of Commons and announced that she had done nothing wrong. It was a lie too far and soon after Tessa paid the price by keeping her job.

"I have done the decent thing," she told reporters. "I am turning my back on my husband and am devoting the rest of my life to helping the needy and desperate in the West End, i.e. Tony and Cherie."



The woman who didn't bring down the government

That Goldsmith/ Knacker Illegal Taped Conversation In Full

Knacker: Hello, hello, hello, Knacker of the Yard here.

Lord Goldsmith: It's the Attorney General. I want to talk to you about phone tapping.

Knacker: Can you just say that again for level?

Goldsmith: Look, we're not happy about you going round bugging anyone you feel like.

Knacker: Hang on. I think I've pressed the wrong button. Testing! Testing! 1-2-3...

Goldsmith: What?

Knacker: What did you have for breakfast?

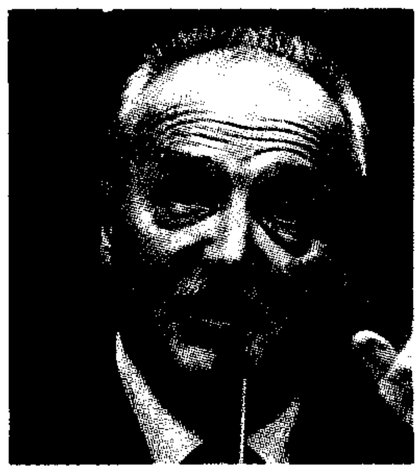
Goldsmith: You have no right to

ask that. You are invading my privacy. I demand to see my Solicitor General.

Knacker: Oh, I see what's gone wrong. I haven't put a tape in *(cont p. 94)*

THAT GALLOWAY RADIO PHONE-IN SHOW

What You Will Miss



George Galloway: And our next caller is Saddam from Baghdad. Hello, Saddam. What is your point?

Saddam Hussein *(for it is he)*: Hello, George – alright?

George Galloway: Yes, I'm alright, thanks. We're talking about Milosevic here.

Saddam: Well, it's obvious he was poisoned, isn't it? Do you think I should eat anything while I'm in jail? Because, I mean, they could easily do me in too, couldn't they, George? I mean, I wouldn't even know, would I?

George Galloway: Good point, Saddam.

Saddam: And, what's more, mate, I'm *innocent*, George.

Galloway: I know that – we all know that – and, if it were up to me, Saddam, I'd open up the jail and say, "You're free, mate, it's President Bush who should be locked up for war crimes".

Saddam: Too right, George. Anyway, I've gotta say, I love the show.

Galloway: Cheers, and I salute your courage and indefatigability. And our next caller is Osama from Afghanistan who wants to talk about the rugby.

Osama: I mean, England were rubbish, George, let's face it, but that Italian side, they could be World Champions in a few years, couldn't they? *(continues all night)*

SOAP UPDATE

Westenders

Tony and Cherie are desperately worried about paying off the mortgage on their 4 million house. Their friend Tessa suggests a loan from her husband's Italian friend Silvio. They are tempted but then old friends Philip and Gail come up with a better idea. What about a big book deal to help them through their difficult patch?

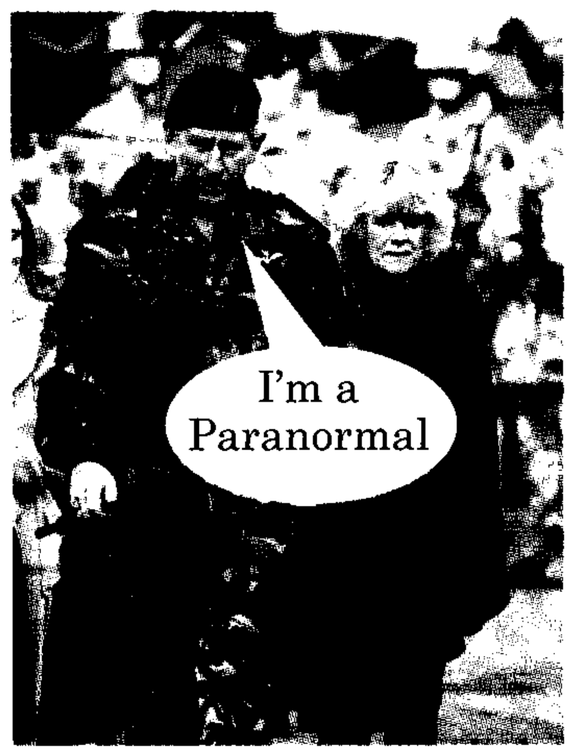
Tony meanwhile is working on the market stall selling dodgy peerages at a knockdown price. Will he be found out?

Torynation Street

David and Samantha are over the moon at the birth of baby Arthur but they have fallen out with their old friend Rachel who hasn't been invited to the christening. The secret is soon out – Rachel has been having an affair with Samantha's mother's 2nd husband, Lord Astor. Expect fireworks around the font!

Libdemmerdale

The elderly Scottish born Chinese newsagent, Ming, has taken over and is trying to restore order in the *(cont. p. 94)*



COURT CIRCULAR

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

March 17: The President of the Federative Republic of Brazil, Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva, today began a state visit.

The President drove down Horse Guards to Buckingham Palace where he was greeted by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh.

Gun salutes were fired by The King's Troop, the Royal House Artillery and six armed police marksmen who, after a shouted warning to drop his rucksack, fired six bullets at close range into the President's head and torso.

POLICE LOG

Neasden Central Police Station

Office hours: 9-12 Mon-Tues (except Tuesday)

8 March 2006

0815 hrs Working breakfast for all officers engaged in the ongoing identification exercise with regard to the recent demonstration by members of the Muslim community in respect of the inflammatory and offensive Danish cartoons. Officers had studied several thousand hours of CCTV and video footage, showing the alleged demonstrators calling for the alleged beheading of all Jews and Westerners. After an intensive four-week scrutiny, officers came to the responsible conclusion that none of those involved could be identified after this lapse of time, and that the alleged burning-down of the supposedly Danish retail outlet Ikea in Robert Mugabe avenue never took place. It was concluded that no further action should be taken with regard to this one.

0946 hrs The new tariff for calls to the police station comes into effect. PC Tremlett was detailed to record the necessary message for the station answerphone, as follows:

"Hullo. Thanks for calling Neasden Police Station. Your call is valuable to us. If you are reporting a non-emergency, such as burglary, rape, murder or arson, your call will be charged at a premium rate of no more than £15 a minute. If, however, you are involved in an emergency situation – e.g. you have observed a female motorist applying cosmetics while waiting at a traffic light – your call will be free of charge and we will immediately send officers to the scene to take the necessary action."

1115 hrs A member of the public rings to report the presence of a racist video on the shelves of the new Save The Badger charity shop in Dave Lee Travis Street. The armed response unit immediately surrounded the shop and, after a short gun battle, managed to secure the offending video viz. The Best Of The Black and White Minstrel Show Vol. 2, with the loss of only three lives, viz. the manager Mrs Dorothy Twelvetrees and her two volunteer assistants, Mrs Edith Venables and Mrs Joyce Onanugu-Smith.

1200 hrs Eight officers, under Superintendent Ken Cabwallander, assembled at Eurostar, Waterloo, for a fact-finding trip to Paris, France, for further investigation of the murder of the late Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997. The officers made a brief visit to the crime scene in the Pont d'Alma underpass before repairing to the Ritz Hotel, where the following items were consumed:

Fuggin' Hors d'Oeuvres

Fuggin' Entrée

Choice of Fuggin' Desserts from the Fuggin' Trolley

Loads of Fuggin' Chateau Lafayed

Huge Fuggin' Bill

Having established to their satisfaction that they would have to make a further visit to Paris to bring their investigations to a conclusion, the officers were then given two hours' compassionate shopping leave in the Galeries Lafayette to help them come to terms with their grief.

2230 hrs Two of the station's Firearms Unit, PC Trigger and PC Happy, have been officially commended for their part in the shooting last July of a suspected al-Qae'da terrorist, Jean Carlos de Menezes, at the Stockwell Underground Station. An internal inquiry has concluded that all officers involved in the incident had been scrupulous in following official procedures, which have now been adopted as standard following the execution of the suspected Brazilian electrician.

"Excuse me, Sir, would you mind explaining why you're not wearing a fluorescent safety jacket?"

CHAI PATEL ADMITTED TO PRIORY

by Our Medical Staff **Dr Thomas Utterfraud**

ONE of Labour's top donors, Dr Chai Patel, has been admitted to his own clinic suffering from acute depression brought on by a lack of peerage.

Doctors who have examined Dr Patel confirm that he is a victim of Crony's Disease. What happens, says a doctor, is that the patient donates a large sum of money to the Labour Party in the expectation that he will be cured of being a commoner and will be admitted immediately to the House of Lords.

Donor Kebabed

In very rare cases, however, such as Dr Patel's, the donated money is taken by open wallet surgery, but the host body (in this case, the Labour Party) then rejects the donor.

This can result in feelings of anger, depression, hurt feelings, lack of esteem and a strong desire to give interviews to the Daily Mail attacking the government.

● *Read Dr Utterfraud's blog on utterfraud.blog.com*

POLLY FILLER

I'M sorry, but I just don't buy this stuff about equal pay for women. How's this for a radical idea? Equal pay for men. Particularly for useless partners who live off their talented "other halves" whilst lying around watching *Pimp My Tank* live from Baghdad, presented by Peaches Geldof and Kelly Osborne on MTV Living Plus Gold all day!

The real money in this house comes from – guess who? – the woman in the equation, who is slaving away, writing best-sellers about modern motherhood, such as *"Pun In The Oven! The Pregnancy Diaries!"*, *"Yummy Money! The Trials And Tribulations Of Modern Motherhood"* and *"It's All Gone Au-Pair-Shaped! The Pitfalls And Prattfalls Of 21st Century Childcare"* (all published by Johnson and Pearson, now available as a 3 for 2 offer at Waterstone's).

THE day that Simon gets equal pay to yours truly will presumably be the same day he works out where the washing machine is, helps toddler Charlie with his saxophone practice, rustles up a gourmet meal and then does the washing up – ie, never!

I'm all for equal pay between the sexes and, unlike most people, I'm putting it into practice. That's why our new male au-pair, Yurt, from Ulan Baatar, will be getting exactly the same wage as we paid the hopeless Hasha from Northern Afghanistan, who decided that she would rather work in her warlord uncle's poppy fields than potty train toddler Charlie! Yes, he'll be getting nothing too, except of course the unique opportunity to live in a cultured, civilised, erudite, North London home with a delightful family, an iron and a big pile of underwear!! That's what *I* call equality!

© Polly Filler 2006.

That Official Consent Form In Full

I, [ ] *(here fill in name, eg, Chantelle, Waynetta, Janinda etc)*, being of sound mind, having consumed not more than the following quantities of alcoholic beverage in the previous hour:

- 6 Bacardi Breezers
- 8 Vodka and Red Bulls
- 12 pints XXXX lager
- 15 pints Strongbow Cider
- 1 bottle of Meths
- 2 boxes Napa Valley Shiraz (min. contents 8 litres)
- 1 bottle Babycham

and, thereby, for all official and legal purposes, being below the insobriety threshold, do hereby give full consent and immunity from prosecution to [ ] *(here fill in name of prospective sexual partner, eg Wayne, Shane, Vijay, Sir Peregrine Worsthorne, etc.)* to hereinafter engage in any of the following activities, namely:

- Pilates
- Aerlingus
- Rastafarianism
- Parcelforce
- Brokeback Mountain

Copies of this form can be downloaded from the internet at your primary school from www.safeshag.condom

BOOK CHOICE

The Da Vinci Case
by Hugh Fees

IT'S the thriller of the millennium. A team of hacks go in pursuit of the Holy Grail – a legendary pot of gold at the end of a long court case.

But as they try and decipher the complex riddles and codes that constitute British copyright law, they realise that there are more sinister forces at work in their quest. A clandestine society that dates back to the Middle Ages will frustrate their every move and will end up with all the money. "The Brotherhood of Lawyers" will stop at nothing to protect their age-old secret – they always win.

Does Anyone Read The New Scientist? (Wasp Press)

COLLECTION of bizarre questions guaranteed to baffle the inquisitive. Surprise best-seller last Christmas, beating *"Is It Me Or Is Everything Schott?"* and *"Talk To The Manager, The Sales Assistant Doesn't Know Where The Lynne Truss Book Is"*.

MODERN NURSERY RHYMES

the PREMIERSH*TS

SOCCER SKILLS COURSE
IN TODAY'S GAME A GOOD SOLID WALL IS ESSENTIAL
SOMETIMES IT CAN HAVE UP TO EIGHT OR NINE PLAYERS IN IT...
"DEPENDING ON THE SITUATION..."
ARRGH
RED CARD? MAYBE WE CAN CHANGE YOUR MIND!
WHAT?
YEH, WE KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE!
AND WHERE YOUR SON GOES TO SCHOOL

That Tory Relaunch In Full

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore**

DAVID CAMERON yesterday answered critics by spelling out in detail just what his new "modern and compassionate" Conservative Party stands for in a new manifesto *Built Too Fast*:

1. A windfarm in every home.

2. A chocolate orange in every fridge.

3. An Old Etonian in every Cabinet post.

4. Mr Blair's doing a very good job.

5. Er...

6. ...That's it.

Jowell Cleared On All Counts – Official

THE report of an inquiry conducted by the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Gus O'Donnell, into the conduct of the Rt. Hon. Tessa Jowell MP, in relation to various huge sums of money which her husband seems to have got hold of without knowing how and without her being aware of it.

1. Terms Of Reference

I have been invited by the Prime Minister to provide an impartial report on the conduct of his great friend Mrs Jowell and to find her innocent of any malfeasance or impropriety whatsoever.

2. Evidence

I have given very careful consideration to all the evidence so far available concerning Mrs Jowell's part in this affair (ie, yesterday's Daily Mail).

3. Assessment

It strikes me that Mrs Jowell's husband, Mr David Mills, may be a bit of a dodgy character, and is definitely not the sort of person with whom politicians of the stature of Mrs Jowell or Mr Silvio Berlusconi should be associated.

However, there is no evidence that Mrs Jowell was in any way cognisant of her husband's distinctly shady activities, and when she signed the alleged £350,000 mortgage form on her kitchen table, it now appears that she was suffering a temporary attack of amnesia caused by bird flu. It was also quite dark at the time, and the print in the contract was very small.

Mrs Jowell tells me that she had left her glasses on the hall table, on a huge pile of cash given to her husband by Signor Berlusconi. *(I am not sure that this bit should go in – what do you think? G. O'D.)*

4. Recommendations

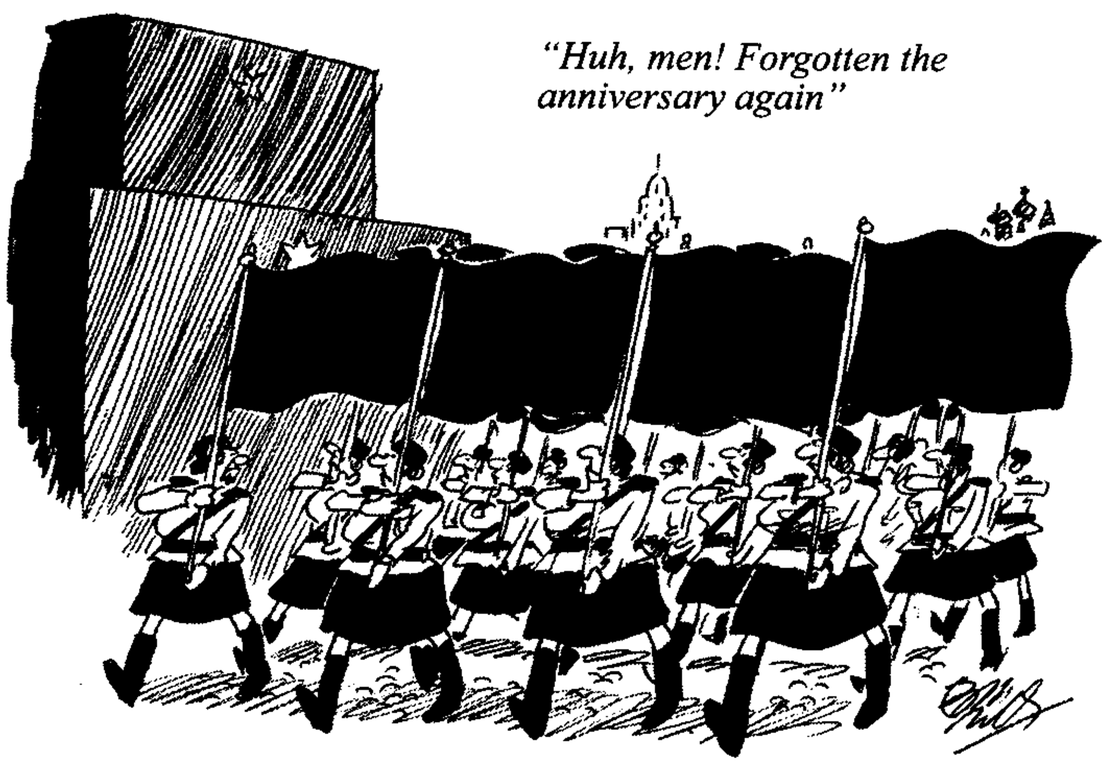
It might be a good idea, as Mr Campbell has suggested, if Mrs Jowell were to announce that she and her husband are to effect a temporary end to their marriage, until such unfortunate events have been forgotten, and we have all moved on.

5. Conclusions

Personally, I blame the media.

(PS. I hope this is what you wanted, Tony. As you know, I had to scribble this out on the train on the way home.)

© Lord O'Donnell of Whitewash 2008.



"Huh, men! Forgotten the anniversary again"

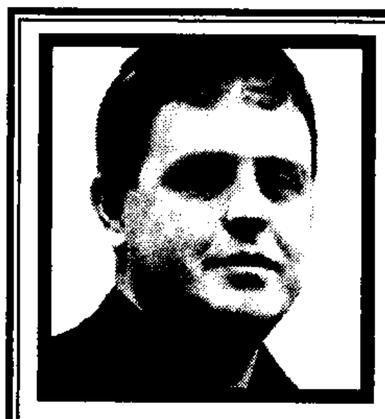
TORIES FURIOUS AT NEW LABOUR SLEAZE

by Our Political Staff **Phil Boots**

SENIOR Tories have expressed their outrage over the latest financial scandal involving a Government minister.

Said one, "This is just another example of New Labour stealing our ideas. Sleaze is, and always has been, a Conservative policy. We have a long tradition of sleaze and the public knows that there is only one party that can be trusted with sleaze and that is the Tories."

However another spokesman was more realistic, "We have to accept the fact that the public no longer see us as the natural party of sleaze. Sleaze has become one of Labour's core values, so we as Tories have simply got to adapt, move with the times and get our fingers firmly back in the till."

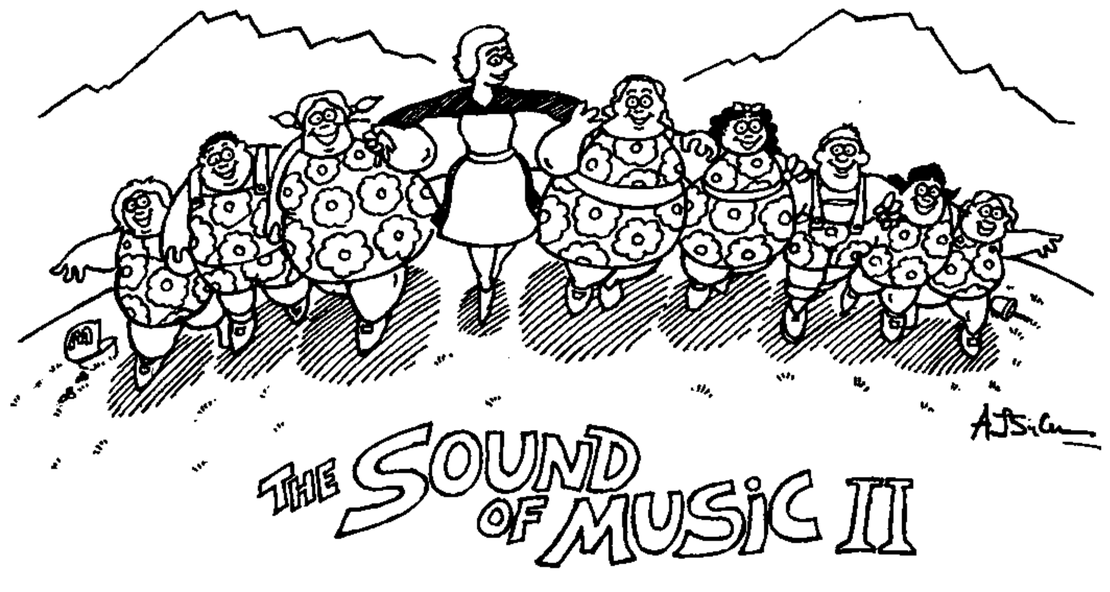


Introducing **Matthew D'Anconservative**, the exciting new voice of the right!

This week, as the new editor of the *Spectacularlyfeeble*, **D'Anconservative** writes about his friend Tessa Jowell and implores the media to lay off one of our most popular and successful ministers.

"I have many times been to dinner with Tessa, and it really is frightfully unfair to take it out on Tessa for Mr Blair's occasional mistakes. I can tell you, frankly, that Tessa is a very nice person, and on more than one occasion has actually remembered my name."

*Read Matthew D'Anlabour only in the Spectator (**and** the Sunday Telegraph **and** the Daily Telegraph).*



THE ALTERNATIVE VOICE

DEIRDRE SPART (Co-Chair of the Women's Collective AgainstGlass Ceilings And Pro Fair *Trade In* Non-Nut-Based Breakfast Cereals).

The sickening hypocrisy of the male-dominated media in attacking Ms Tessa Jowell just because she is a woman is totally sickening and totally reminiscent of the notorious witch-hunts of the Middle Ages which caused the deaths of millions and millions of innocent women just because... er... anyway why should Mrs Jowell know anything about the family finances, that is a job for a man, er, hang on... anyway, if Ms Jowell had been a man, she would have been totally exonerated and let off the hook like David Blunkett and Peter Mandelson, whereas just because she is a woman, she is... er... *(cont. p. 94)*

NEWS OF ANOTHER WORLD

MING TO BECOME LEADER SHOCK

by Our Political Staff **Andrew Marrs-Attacks**

THE ELDERLY Ming The Merciless has today been elected as Emperor of the planet Mongo.

Promising supporters that he will be occupying "the evil ground" of inter-galactic politics, Ming set out his agenda to take over the planet Earth.

"I have a reputation of being merciless," he said, "and I have both the policies and the death rays to destroy my enemy Not-Very-Flash Gordon."

He told loyalists: "Go back to your constituencies and prepare for Liberal Democracy."

ONLY IN THE DAILY EXPRESS

Was Nessie Really Princess Diana?

SENSATIONAL new evidence today has revealed that the Loch Ness Monster was in fact Princess Diana swimming.

The so-called "trunk" that was visible on the surface of the Loch was, in fact, our beloved Princess Diana's arm, as she waved desperately to people on the shore, trying to attract their attention before she was kidnapped by the Duke of Edinburgh's personal submarine and *(cont. p. 94)*

ONLY IN THE SUN

The columnist no one is reading! *(surely 'missing'? Ed.)*

DAVID Blunkett

IT'S disgraceful when you see a hard-working, popular minister being unfairly hounded by the gutter press because of their messy life and alleged financial irregularities.

I'm talking, of course, about me.

If bloody Tessa Jowell can keep her job when her husband's knee-deep in sleaze, why can't I have mine back? Do you know how soul destroying it is writing a column they stick on page 27 next to a bloody advert for half price exterior doors?

If you people had an ounce of decency you'd *(cut for reasons of space)*

POETRY CORNER

Lines written on the departure of Miss Sarah Sands as Editor of the Sunday Telegraph, 2006-2006.

So. Farewell then
Sarah Sands,
Short-lived editor of the
Sunday Telegraph.

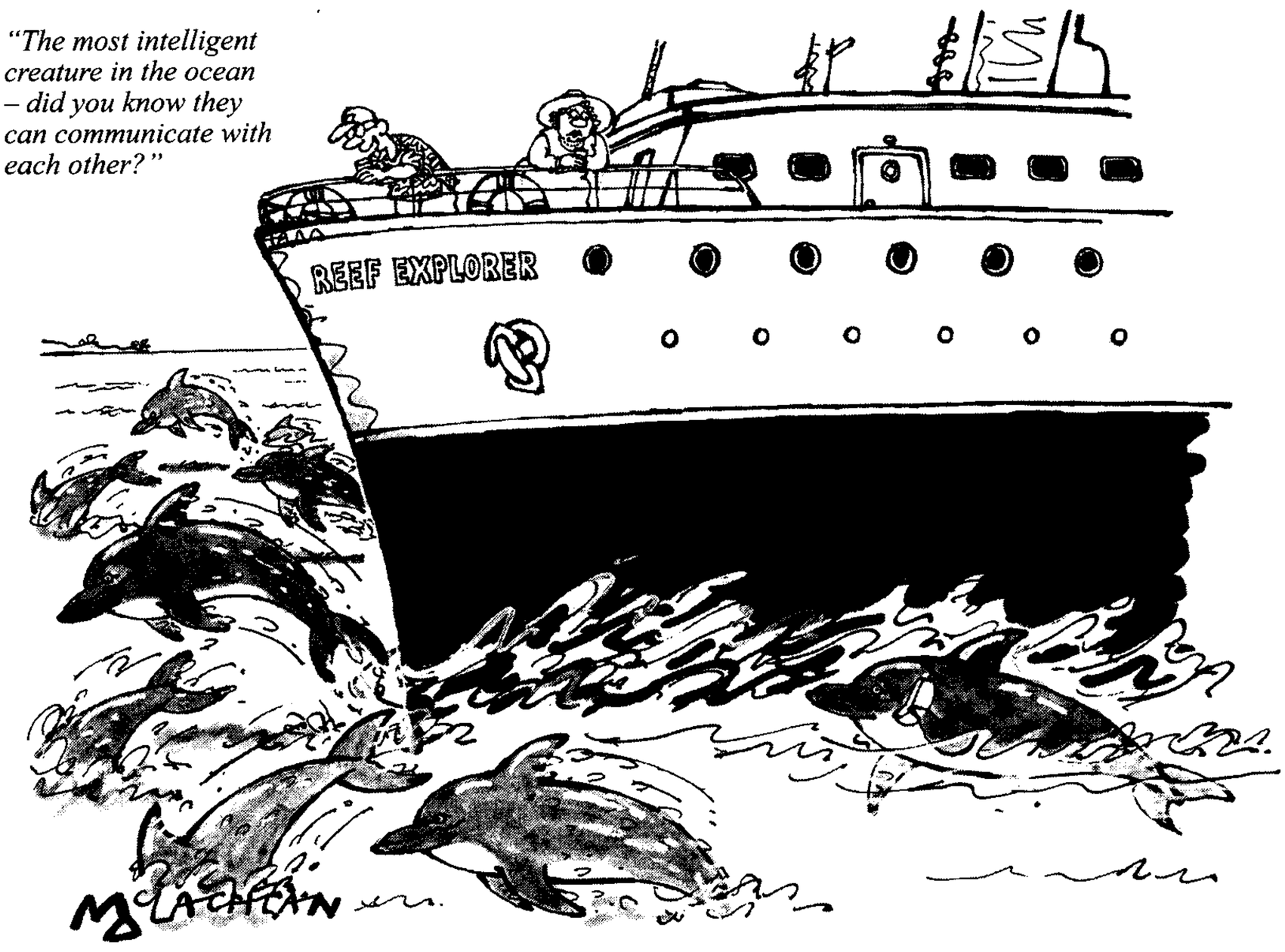
"It will be like
An iPod."

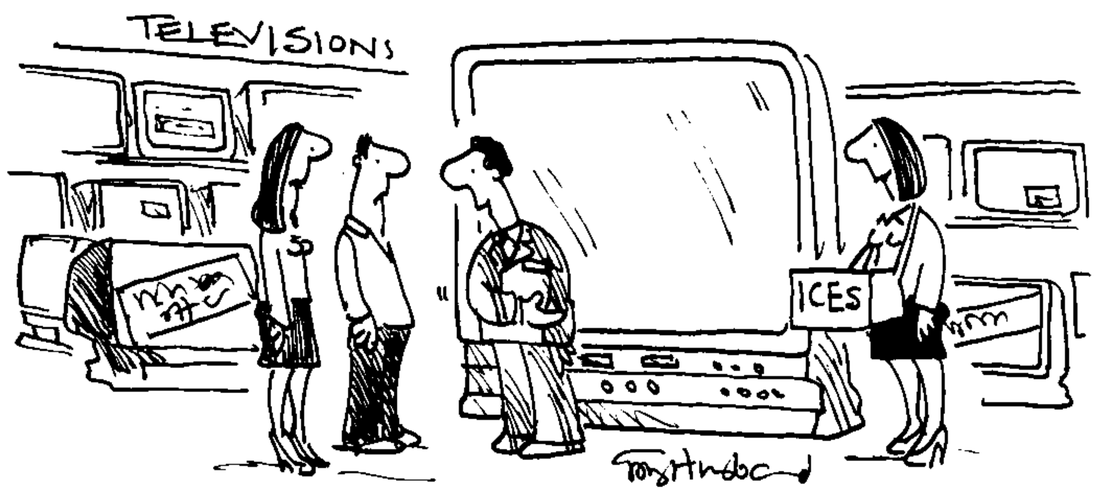
That was your
Catchphrase.

Now you have been
Downloaded.
And the time of Sands
Has run out.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

"The most intelligent creature in the ocean – did you know they can communicate with each other?"





"And this super gigantic television comes with its own usherette"

News in Brief

SECURITAS LATEST

THERE WAS astonishment today after a Securitas van pulling into a depot wasn't robbed of millions of pounds.

"At no stage were we pistol-whipped by balaclava-wearing crims, or our relatives held hostage until we handed over the cash," said an astonished driver. "We simply delivered the money without incident."

Police investigating the incident said they were disappointed, as this meant they wouldn't be able to go on the news and sell their memoirs about "the heist of the century" and *(cont. p. 94)*

OSCAR SENSATION

THERE WAS a shock at this year's Oscars when someone started handing out awards in the middle of the ceremony.

"We never expected something like this to happen, as we all thought it was simply a big frock party," said a shocked *(cont. p. 94)*

EXCLUSIVE TO THE SUN!

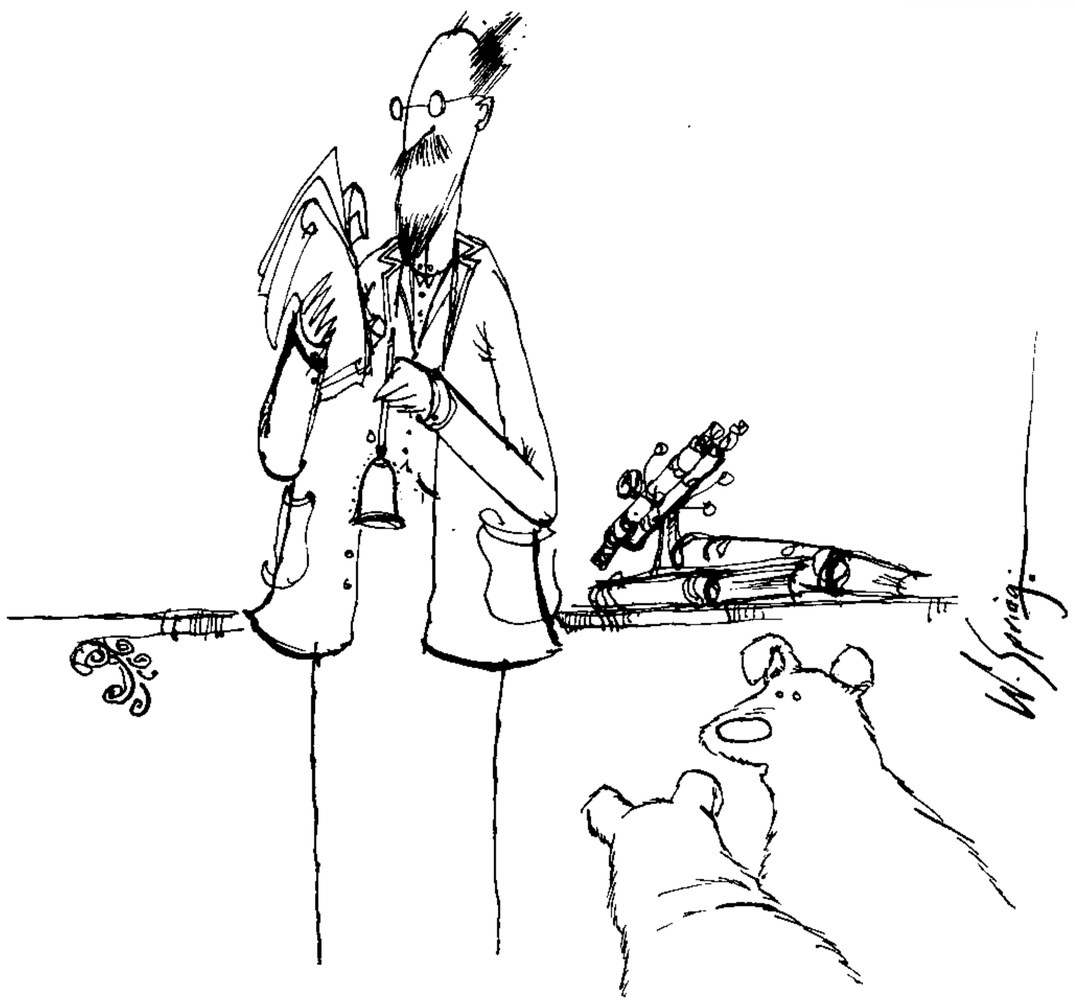
THE SUN ADDICTED TO KATE MOSS

WE can exclusively reveal today the sordid truth that The Sun is still hopelessly addicted to "doing" Kate Moss.

Sun Editor Rebekah Wade's eyes were said to be rolling in the back of her head as she bought more and more pictures of Kate taking cocaine.

"Rebekah was lining up picture after picture on the table," said an insider. "It was sad and pathetic to see how excited these pictures made her."

A Sun insider said, "Her newspaper is in a mess and she really needs to get some help soon."

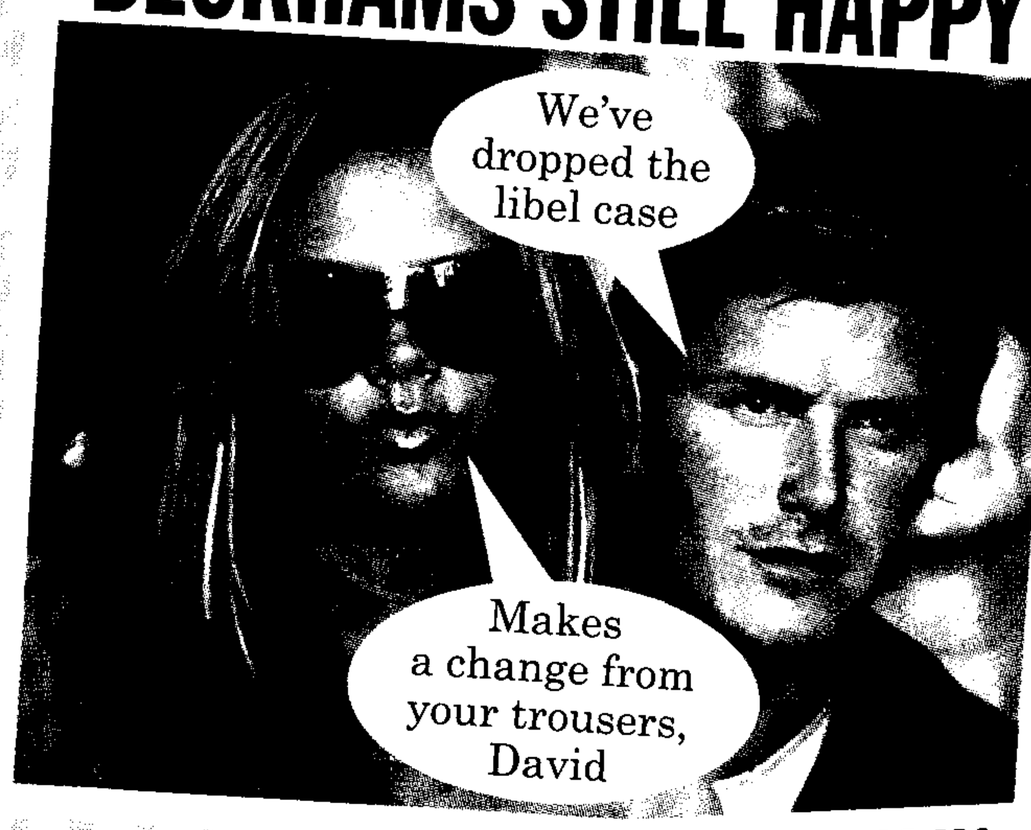


"Watch this, I've discovered that if I stand here and salivate, I can make him ring a little bell"

A WEEK IN PICTURES

CHERIE'S HUMAN RIGHTS SPEECH

BECKHAMS STILL HAPPY



SHOCK – PENSIONER ACCIDENTALLY ASSIGNED 15 CAREWORKERS

WINNER TO SELL NAUGHTY POSTCARD COLLECTION

DIARY

PUNK: AN ORAL HISTORY

MALCOLM McLAREN *(manager, The Sex Pistols):* I followed the aesthetic legacy of William Morris and John Ruskin. Art for art's sake. Make everything beautiful, even ugliness. So when Sid sicked up onstage for the first time, I saw all the colours of the rainbow in the arc of his puke. And I thought, This Is The Future.

JOHN LYDON *(formerly Johnny Rotten):* There's lots of wankers go round claiming they was there when Sid first puked up. Well, fuck them, basically, they're fucking liars, 'cos most of them weren't.

He'd been eating this sandwich, cheese-and-tomato. With a bit of pickle. Well, quite a lot of pickle, actually.

RAT SCABIES *(former drummer with The Damned, now assistant sales manager, Rumbelows, Ipswich)*: Okay, so there's a lot of debate amongst historians about that sandwich Sid puked up. Most agree on it being cheese-and-tomato, right? But it's the pickle that's the issue. I don't remember there being no pickle, and I should know. After all I skidded on that sick, and fell into it, head-first.

DAVID STARKEY *(TV historian, former bass guitarist with Sham 69)*: It's not only ludicrous but frankly preposterous to claim that there was no pickle in Sidney Vicious's sandwich on that or indeed any other occasion. It was an idea first mooted by Hugh Trevor-Roper in his grotesquely over-rated history of punk, and it seems to have caught on. Hughie should have had his bottom smacked. But I was there that night and I should know. Vicious was a man addicted to pickle, and that pool of vomit was full to the brim with it. Branston's, if you really want to know.

PAUL MORLEY *(music journalist)*: Pickle or no pickle, when Sid puked over that zeitgeist stage, he ultimately created a post-modernist seismic whirlpool zeitgeist of sublime yet catastrophic zeitgeist, at once strangely familiar yet completely unfamiliar, a masterpiece of vomit that both expressed the whole complex zeigeist of the times yet was ultimately destroyed by it.

MALCOLM McLAREN: I bagged up Sid's sick at the time and sold it to Nick Serota a few years back. It'll be centrepiece at a major Punk retrospective at Tate Britain in the autumn. The question is, how to hang it.

PETE SHELLEY *(former lead vocalist with The Buzzcocks, now West Midlands Area Manager, Callard and Bowser)*: I was at the 100 Club when they invented pogo-ing. By the end of that Tuesday night, you had all these people jumping up and down. No-one had ever jumped up and down before ever in the history of the world. It wasn't just historic. It was, well, historic.

ANN WIDDECOMBE *(former drummer with Penetration, now Conservative MP for Maidstone and The Weald)*: I was, as ever, first through the door at the 100 Club. This was before I was in a band, I was just a fan in those days. It was a Tuesday, and I was in my bondage gear, with some sort of tight PVC hood over my head. And halfway through a really super set by The Damned I just started jumping up and down in time with the movement. So I can honestly claim to have invented it. And I remember thinking, "My goodness, this is a smashing new dance! Why not let's call it the Pogo?!!" So I turned to my chums with their safety pins all neatly in place and I said, "Come on, you lot – let's pogo!" Yes, it was exhausting, but it made for very healthy exercise, too. You know, it's all too easy to forget what good exercise Punk provided.

JOHN LYDON: It wasn't The Damned playing that Tuesday, it was us. I was gobbing at the audience, and they was standing with their mouths open, pogoing up and down like penguins, trying to catch it. It was a semolina moment in the history of punk.

VIVIENNE WESTWOOD *(fashion designer)*: I was hugely influenced by my reading of Thomas Hardly's novels at the time. To me, those torn T-shirts were very Jess of the D'Urbervilles. And the moment Johnny Rotten walked into the shop, I thought: Mayor of Castlebridge! So the whole punk look was really a homage to Thomas Hardly, but before the end of that summer I had moved on to Marco Proust, who inspired the whole safety-pin look, very Recherche, very Tom Perdew.

STING *(former singer and bassist with Police)*: We tried to bring something new and exciting to punk. Regular laundry, decent transport, vintage wine, that sort of thing. And I think we proved that punk could get you to places no-one expected: a stately home outside Salisbury, for instance, or a country estate in Umbria.

SIR MENZIES CAMPBELL *(former triangle player, The Clash, now leader of the Liberal Democrats)*: I am of the same generation as Vivienne, and, like her, I was proud to call myself a punk in those days, oh, very much so. No, I was never sick in a concert hall, but let me add this: if I had been, I would not have been ashamed to admit it, and I would, of course, been the first to lend a hand with clearing up the vomit in question. I have always regarded the safety-pin as a precious asset in our community.

It is my aim to bring some of that very real sense of youthful energy and enthusiasm – not to mention vomit – to the Liberal Democratic Party of today. In a very real way, to be a Liberal Democrat is to be a punk, and I intend to keep it that way. I know my colleague Simon Hughes claims to have been a founder member of X-Ray Spex, and I congratulate him on his considerable achievement. My abiding memory of the punk movement? Its belief in creating a strong, effective society with a greener, fairer and more democratic Britain at peace with itself at home and admired abroad.

MALCOLM McLAREN: After inventing punk, I soon got bored with it, so I went on to invent modern opera, then colour photography, then compact discs, and, more recently, the i-Pod. Now, when I play golf at Wentworth with Johnny Rotten, we don't give a fuck – we sometimes leave our top buttons undone! We're still rebels, see. Yeah!

A. S. BYATT *(former bassist with The Slits, now author and critic)*: In a very real sense, the punk movement has had an extraordinarily symbiotic effect on the great narrative adventure that is, in a very real sense, the modern novel. By which I mean that in a very profound sense that we are all in what I would call the post-punk period, by which I mean – I'm sorry, you'll have to excuse me because, in a very real sense, I feel a vomit coming on.

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

WHAT ARE YOU WATCHING, GARY?
AN OLD VIDEO OF PIXIE FROU-FROU AND ROSEDROP WHEN THEY WERE LITTLE GIRLS...
IT'S EVER SO SWEET. THEY'RE PLAYING CHOO-CHOOS BLESS 'EM... LOOK.
AH! BLESS!
CHOO, CHOO.
CHOO, CHOO...
THEY GROW UP SO QUICKLY, DON'T THEY?
YES THEY WERE INTO JIMMY CHOO SHOES EVEN WHEN THEY WERE AT PRIMARY SCHOOL...
CHOO!
CHOO CHOO

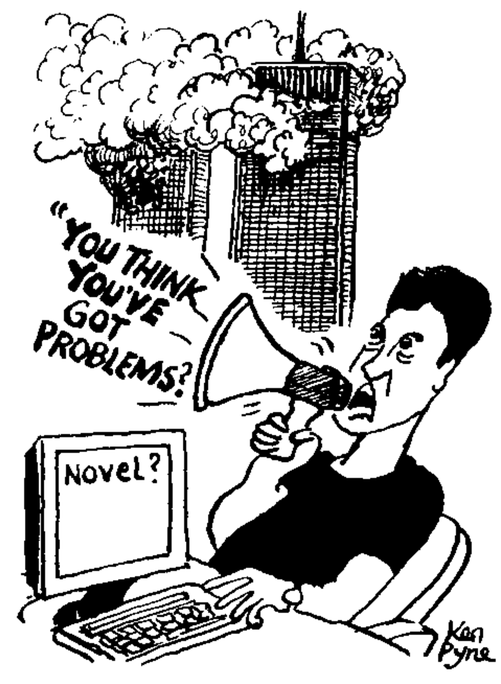
Literary Review

Rotten big apple

The Good Life
Jay McInerney
(Bloomsbury, £16.99)

IN SEPTEMBER last year, Jay McInerney wrote an essay for the *Guardian* in response to comments from VS Naipaul in the *New York Times*. Naipaul had claimed that the novel was dead: only non-fiction could address the hefty issues of modern life in a – sickbags please – "post-September 11 era". In response, McInerney pointed out that ever since the birth of the novel its imminent demise has been prophesied by one luminary or another. Naipaul was only getting uppity because all his recent fiction was tripe.

Such handbags are all very entertaining but unfortunately, McInerney didn't stop there: "It is to the novel, ultimately, that we turn to confirm our own senses and emotions, to reveal emotional truths that approach the condition of music. The fact is that we are waiting for our major novelists to weigh in and make sense of the world for us after the events of September 11 2001 and July 7 2005."



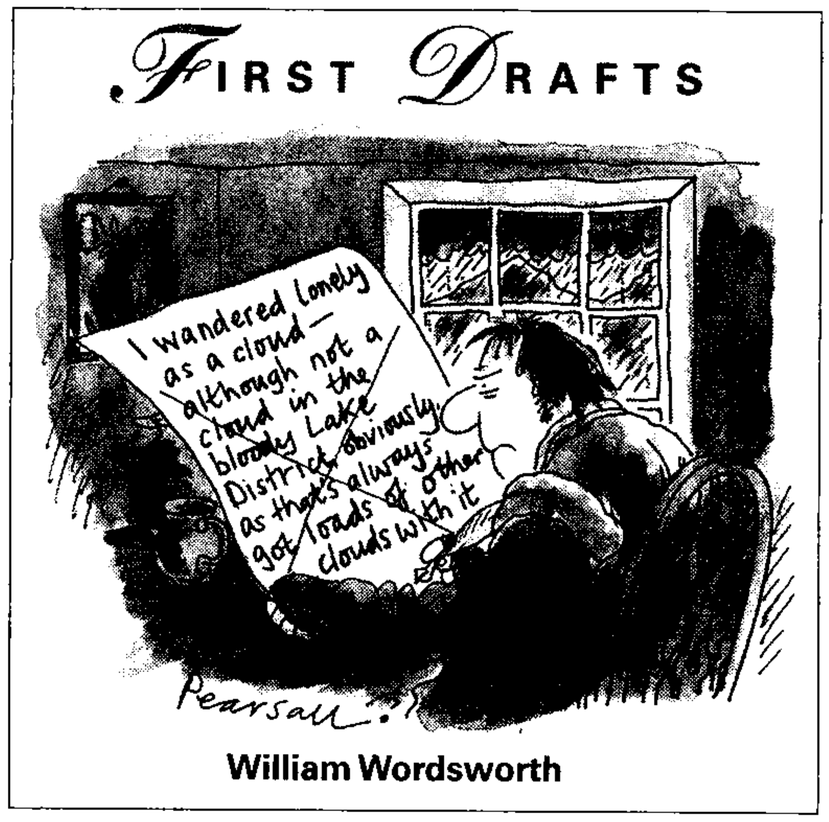
He didn't say who exactly made up this putative "we", but no matter, because it just so happened that a major novelist called Jay McInerney was about to step in to the breach. "As a novelist who considers New York his proper subject, I didn't see how I could avoid confronting the most important and traumatic event in the history of the city. I almost abandoned the book several times, and often wondered whether it wasn't foolish to create a fictional universe that encompassed the actual event. At the very least, certain forms of irony and social satire in which I'd trafficked no longer seemed useful."

In among such pompous bunkum – the travails of novelists trying to write more novels must seem of vast import to the relatives of the 2,976 people who merely died on September 11 – the phrase that should set alarm bells ringing for McInerney's readers is the one about him turning his back on irony and social satire. McInerney, like his compadre and fellow literary badboy Bret Easton Ellis, made his name with an ironic prose style laced with social sideswipes so sharp they left great gashes in the page. That he should now repudiate the mode in which he excelled and get serious seems troubling, especially as novels such as *Ransom* or *Brightness Falls* – where we were first introduced to several of the characters in *The Good Life* – showed that the more serious Jay gets, the worse he becomes.

So it is with *The Good Life*. To take the defining historical event of the early 21st century, in which two passenger aircraft were deliberately flown in to one of the world's architectural totems, causing them to collapse with devastating loss of life and ramifications that will be felt for decades to come... well, it requires some sorcery to make all of that dull, but that is *The Good Life*'s most notable achievement. It is perilously dreary. From the ashes of Ground Zero the book follows the course of a tryst between a pair of fortysomething Manhattan yuppies. Both of them are in loveless marriages leading vacuous lives when they meet at a soup kitchen for the rescue workers. With a ham-fisted overarching metaphor that Barbara Cartland would be proud of, an affair rises from the ashes. That we are expected to be interested in self-absorbed affluent professionals using 9/11 as a line from which to hang their emotional washing is mildly nauseating. But not as nauseating as McInerney's prolix playing out of the affair, which takes up the majority of the novel and ultimately makes one wish that the couple in question had been in the towers themselves. Here is a typical exchange:

"'Do you really want me?' 'I want you so badly, I can hardly stand it.' 'Me too.' 'We have time,' he said. 'The rest of our lives.'"

It's genuinely hard to believe that the same pen that nailed the Me generation in *Bright Lights, Big City* could be behind this spoony old dribbling; it's then doubly galling to chance upon examples of the old spark, such as a dinner party where the host includes anti-anthrax prescriptions folded in the place names. Clearly McInerney is looking to mine September 11 for the kind of emotional depth that allows a hip literary gunslinger to graduate to the ranks of what he calls "major novelist". Instead, he has sacrificed everything that made his early prose memorable for precisely the sort of wallpaper dialogue and saccharine schmaltz that the McInerney of old would have eviscerated with a wry one-liner. And so warballs claims another casualty...


FIRST DRAFTS
I wandered lonely as a cloud— although not a cloud in the bloomley Lake District, obviously, as that's always got loads of other clouds with it
Pearsall
William Wordsworth

Books & Bookmen

■ WITH venture capitalist Permira tipped to indicate the seriousness of its intent to buy HMV by upping its offer from 190p a share, maybe the Competition Commission will have had its decision made for it by the time it reports in May. The only thing missing is a bid from Tim Waterstone himself, but there's still time.

However, some are now suggesting that it will be worse for the book trade if the Wottakar's merger *doesn't* take place. The apocalyptic logic goes that both will founder unless allowed to unite – but the logic seems faulty. Whatever happens, there will always be a sizeable market for books that supermarkets and WH Smith won't touch and someone will need to serve it. At Lord Archole's recent book launch, Asda's book buyer admitted that they hadn't read the book, taking 25,000 copies on the strength of the cover and the peer's name. For authors without Archole's advantages, real booksellers who look inside or at least read the blurb sheet are the only hope.

Meanwhile the arrival of former key Waterstonian David Roche as CEO of rival chain Borders is being read by many as a clue to the eventual destination of the omnipotent chief buyer Scott Pack, who is working six months' notice before leaving the Brentford circus. If so, what happened to the rumours that he was in discussions with publishers about job opportunities?

PLUGGING PERILS I

■ EX-JAILBIRD Jeffrey Archer's attempted public rehabilitation came unstuck when he went on Radio 4's *Front Row* to plug his new book, *False Impression* (see review).

Archole was stroppy throughout with interviewer Mark Lawson, denying he was "returning to public life" and saying he was only breaking cover because he was publishing a new title.

Asked if it had been in poor taste to use 9/11 in a thriller, the disgraced peer said he had actually cut that chapter back but his American publisher had wanted more on the tragedy. Yeah, right.

What really incensed Archole, however, was that Lawson kept asking him about prison. Eventually Jeffrey had had enough and stormed out. As he left, he was heard to tell Lawson off-mike: "You could learn a lesson in professionalism from Andrew Marr" – Marr evidently having given him a far easier ride on the Sunday morning sofa.

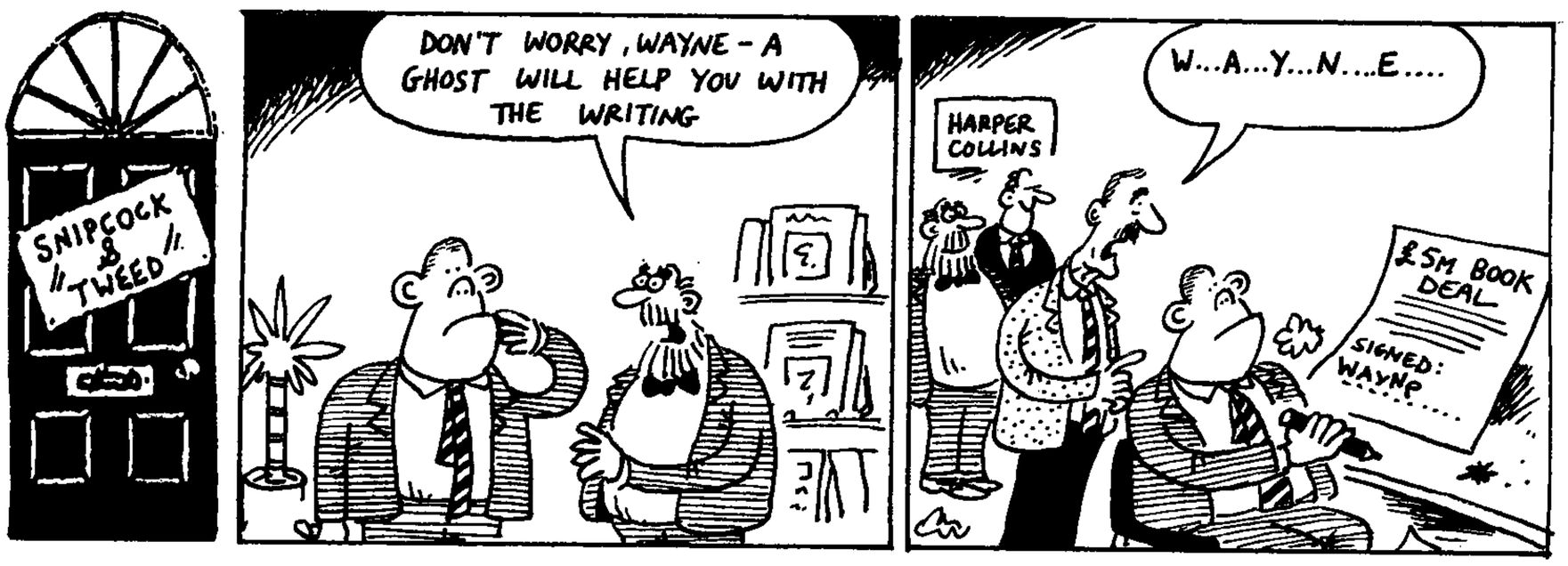
PLUGGING PERILS II

■ WHEN the *Daily Telegraph*'s Jan Moir wrote a scathing account of her meeting with glamour model Jordan who was puffing her second volume of autobiography, Moir expected some comeback from the gobby model.

Sure enough a letter of complaint duly arrived from Jordan's PR, Diana Colbert. Did Jordan, aka Katie Price, want recompense for the suggestion that she was money-grabbing? Or did Moir's description of the fake-tanned model as an "angry carrot" make her blow her top?

No. The publicity junkie had apparently felt intimidated that Moir had two tape recorders rolling during the interview. She also felt Moir had invaded her space by sitting too close to her on a leather banquette. The final insult was that Moir had asked Jordan's make-up artist if he had any children. Why so insulting? Because, according to Jordan, he is obviously gay...

'Bookworm'



Vintage stuff

False Impression

Jeffrey Archer

(Macmillan, £17.99)

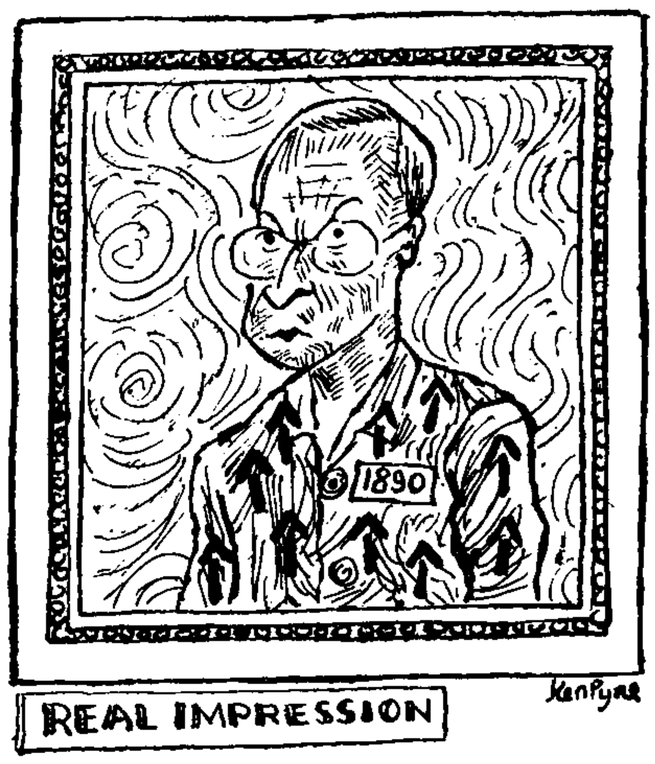
LET'S face it, there are few easier targets in book-reviewing than Lord Fish of Barrel-Super-Mare. Nonetheless, even the stoniest-hearted critic would have to concede that it has been a difficult few years for the great man.

If reputations were football teams, his would be right down there in the Auto Brake-Linings League, Division 8, along with Gary Glitter's and Pol Pot's. There can surely be no way back into public affections for Archer, and yet, resilient to the last, he keeps on going. He did not need to sit down and "write" this "novel", but that's what he seems to have done, as though none of the rest of it ever happened. You have to admire his tenacity. Well, not entirely ignore it, anyway. The book, of course, is another matter entirely.

False Impression – o woe is me! I'm really very honest and likeable! – leaps straight into the action with a chapter entitled "9/10", so we know with weary certainty that the Twin Towers are about to be knocked over with several important characters inside. Archer doesn't believe in messing about, or in light and shade, so every character we meet is Essentially Good or Very Evil Indeed. Or, in a new twist, Stolen From Thunderbirds.

On the very first page, a butler says "Yes, m'lady" twice, and you quickly realise that Parker and Lady Penelope are infinitely more rounded characters than anyone we're going to find here. The American banker Bryce Fenston, for instance, is so fantastically evil you keep expecting him to cackle and twirl an invisible moustache. Only in the depiction of his heroine does Archer show any restraint, managing to wait until page 19 before revealing that she has a photographic memory.

And the writing is of course astonishing. "A solution to all her problems had been found, quite literally at the eleventh hour." Well, that's lucky. If it had happened in the middle of dinner you wouldn't have been able to say that. "Nothing annoyed her more than having to stop in the middle of her morning run to re-tie her laces." What, nothing at all? Archer is supposed



to be a great storyteller, but nothing disturbs the flow more effectively than a sentence like this. Sometimes mere words can do it. These are all from the same paragraph: "Her eyes settled on the letter... she grabbed the unfinished missive... Arabella stuffed the epistle into her pocket..." It's almost a masterclass on how to write badly. Most writers make some effort to avoid cliché, but Archer embraces cliché in much the same way that lungs embrace air. After a while you start playing little internal games with his prose. A Japanese character guards the details of his private art collection... how? Five points and a gold star if you guessed "with typical Japanese inscrutability".

What none of this squares with is the long-standing assumption that Archer knocks together a few quick notes and gets others, presumably his editors, to write the actual book. Surely no editors alive could write this feebly, even if they were trying. More likely is that Archer writes every word and then won't let anyone change it. His relentless narcissistic need for control is well documented, and you could ascribe his apparent refusal to rewrite or improve his prose to the egocentric belief that what he writes is good enough because it is written by him. Alternatively, after 11 novels and countless plagiarised short stories, he simply doesn't know how to do it. "The first driver left his hand on the horn for some time, leaving Anna in no doubt of his feelings." Even Dan Brown is better than this.

It's at this point in the review that the critic usually admits that, despite the unspeakable dialogue, the endless clunky exposition and the dismal heavy-handed attempts at humour, Archer's storytelling skills overcome all objections and compel you to finish the book in a single sitting. If only this were so. Instead, as you limp to the inevitable, heavily flagged final twist, you feel a bit like Morgan Spurlock after eating nothing but McDonald's for a month: bloated by plot, but undernourished almost to the point of hospitalisation. Maybe his books should come with a government health warning. Or maybe, in the form of the words "Jeffrey" and "Archer", they already do.

LIBRARY NEWS

■ "HUGE fall in book borrowing" read the headlines after figures from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (Cipfa) showed that London's libraries lent 7.5m fewer books in 2004-05 than in 2000-01.

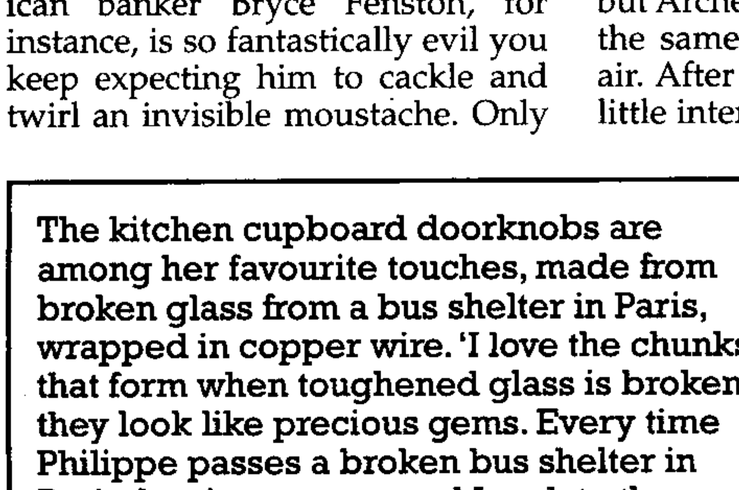
This kind of news will be very helpful to those making the case in future that no one much wants books from libraries anyway. For example, the *Evening Standard* has quoted "experts" as saying that the availability of cheaper books in shops is contributing to the downfall of the public library.

But can that be right? Surely the reason fewer books were borrowed was that there were fewer libraries in the city. Previous studies have registered that 14 public libraries closed in greater London during the four years up to 2004 and more closed during the year in question. Sales of popular libraries, such as the Arthur Simpson Library in Islington, and Totteridge Library in Barnet, to developers have featured regularly in these pages. And of those remaining, many have had their hours and book budgets cut.

The Cipfa figures point to Merton having the sharpest drop in borrowing. But could that be because one of its seven libraries, Raynes Park, was closed throughout 2004-05 while it was rebuilt? The borough also lost libraries at Lower Morden and Wimbledon Park and scrapped its mobile library service in recent years, despite a huge outcry from readers. The truth is that people can't borrow books that aren't there.

The kitchen cupboard doorknobs are among her favourite touches, made from broken glass from a bus shelter in Paris, wrapped in copper wire. 'I love the chunks that form when toughened glass is broken; they look like precious gems. Every time Philippe passes a broken bus shelter in Paris, he rings me up and I rush to the scene and collect the glass,' she says.

Designer CHERRY CHAU refurbishes her husband's 500 year-old Normandy chateau, *Evening Standard*



Horses as mirrors of ourselves

This is a unique combination of horses and psychodrama, which aims to help with self discovery offering the possibility of new perspectives on ourselves and our relationships. Working experientially and with their non-judgmental, honest, unbiased

Pseuds Corner

ability to give feedback, the horses offer us the chance to learn by doing.

Brookfield Equestrian Centre advertisement, *Therapy Today*

Welcome to the first issue of Insight City News; the popular new publication of this young metropolis on the way up. A city that is advancing materially, culturally and creatively. Insight City News is a newspaper for people who live lifestyles that are complete and complex and surprising. It is as local as your postcode and as international as your tastes. It's the local paper of a particular space and time, and also the global newspaper of a state of mind. Insight City News is Brighton & Hove actually.

From the editorial

Pseuds Corporate

Visual Merchandising Specialist

Delivers the visual proposition across a multi-branded environment ensuring that Outfit and the individual Brand message are clearly recognised, through the use of window/internal displays, graphics, layouts and retail standards.

Burtons advertises for a window dresser, *Borehamwood Times*

I am a seeker of truth. There is always a greater truth and it normally comes from context. Ultimate truth is often a paradox, and when you arrive at the paradox you have got the truth and you have to make a decision and bear the responsibility for that.

Cadbury Schweppes Property Group Head ROBIN WORTHINGTON, *Property Week*

Pseuds Educational

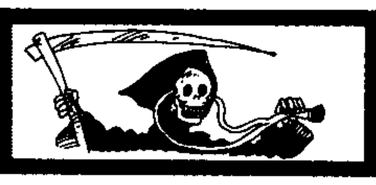
Making connections: exploring synergies and tensions in the interface between systemic change and the sustainability agenda

Dr Stephen Sterling, Schumacher Reader in Education for Sustainability University of Plymouth

In this forum, Stephen will invite participants to explore tensions and synergies between his and their own theoretical and lived understandings of systemic change and learning on the one hand, and the insights and agenda of sustainability on the other.

Co-Inquiry Forum, University of the West of England

CONTRIBUTORS: Simon de Wardener, Kath Edgell, Anthony Miller, Arthur Jones, Tony Morpeth, Richard Hartley.



IN THE BACK: NHS SPECIAL

Done to a Crisp

M.D. WRITES...

FORMER NHS chief executive Nigel Crisp (pictured right) may claim he volunteered for early retirement, but Health Secretary Patsy Hewitt's office had been briefing against him for weeks. Tony Blair is said to have lost patience with his inability to balance the books *and* speed through reforms, but it's hard to see how he could do both when the true level of debt is likely to be far greater than the £1bn "new" Labour has owned up to.

Aside from the millions wasted on constant reconfiguration, toothless quangos, exorbitant PFI deals and absurdly generous private surgery contracts, the government has accelerated the debt by introducing a Payment By Results system which allows hospitals to code and charge for every episode of care according to a national tariff. Alas, the tariff had to be withdrawn in February when the Department of Health admitted that the figures didn't add up, but when it reappears it may well bankrupt the NHS.

In effect, payment is not for results but activity. Every time a patient pitches up to A&E or outpatients, or is admitted to a hospital ward, the cash register rings. The more investigations and treatments you order, the more you can charge – irrespective of whether the patient needs them or gets better. And there's plenty of opportunity for gaming: one West Midlands hospital managed to bump up its earnings by £18m just by tweaking the way its activity was coded.

Now the money has run out, hospitals have been told to stop treating until the next financial year and surgeons are twiddling their thumbs as they used to every year under the Tories. But these political diktats get bad press and the government is praying that GPs can put a brake on hospitals with Practice-Based Commissioning (PBC). In this scheme, GPs work with what remains of their reconfigured PCT to treat more patients in the community and reduce unnecessary referrals to hospital.

But are GPs going to be any better than discredited PCT managers at commissioning care? Under the Tories some fund-holding GPs developed considerable expertise which was then lost when Labour ditched the scheme. Re-heating it nine years later without the financial incentives and in a climate of massive NHS debt looks very unappetising to most GPs.

Those GPs who take up the challenge and try to be innovative are likely to be thwarted by managers and DoH officials whose jobs now depend on cutting the debt. Budgets for PBC projects have already been cut before they've got off the ground. "New" Labour claims to devolve power to the front line, but the level of financial interference from Whitehall is still huge and any practice that dares make a profit will quickly have it snatched away to pay off debts elsewhere.

Add in the government's consumer rhetoric that encourages patients to demand expensive drugs even before they've been properly appraised, and a GP contract that rewards doctors for prescribing vast numbers of medicines that patients can't possibly remember to take, and it's hard to see how anyone can slow down NHS spending. The only certainty is that when the annual NHS bill hits £100bn in a few years' time we'll still be wondering what we've got for our money and whether we're any healthier.

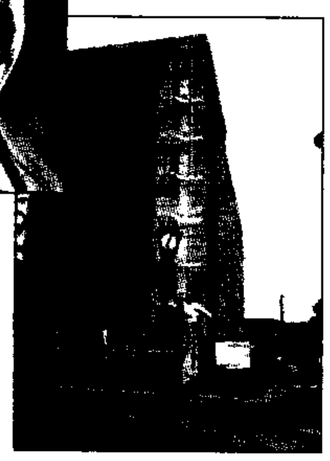
HIT SQUADS

Good Hope, no hope

WILL Sir Nigel Crisp's successor, Sir Ian Carruthers (pictured below), persuade ministers that largescale privatisation is part of the NHS problem and not the solution?

Trusts are having to cope with huge PFI service repayments and unforeseen salary increases, not to mention a raft of reforms aimed at turning the health service into a fully fledged up-for-grabs market.

The government, anxious to blame the individual cash-strapped hospital and primary care trusts that are wrestling with huge deficits and the financial chaos created by government policies and targets, sent out no fewer than 62 "hit squads" from a variety of private management consultancies to show troubled trusts around the country how it should be done.



Whoops! Evidence from the first hospital to be taken over by a private company – the Good Hope Hospital in Sutton Coldfield (pictured right) – show that the management experiment has been a disaster. If anyone had bothered to look at the figures earlier, ministers might have been less inclined to think that a headline-grabbing change at the top could spin an under-resourced trust back into black – the massive task that now faces Carruthers.

The three-year contract to rescue the struggling 550-bed hospital was won in August 2003 by Secta. But the company was eased out eight months early as deficits spiralled even further out of control. By the time the trust's acting chief executive, Secta's Anne Heast, cleared her desk, the trust was piling on deficits at £1m per month, leaving a total shortfall of £47m to be recouped by March 2007. Yet somehow Secta had managed to jack up its own fees by 48 percent in its first year – brilliant given its performance!

Good Hope is now managed by the neighbouring Heart of England Foundation Trust, which has published the results of its investigation into the "unsustainable financial position" the privatised management left behind. The report notes that the problems proliferated at Good Hope even before this year's introduction of Patient Choice, competition from private sector treatment centres and the new "payment by results" system of financing, all of which will put Good Hope under even greater pressure.

A few miles up the M6 meanwhile, another West Midlands trust is also experience the ineffectiveness of the "turnaround teams". University Hospital of North Staffordshire Trust was "named and shamed" by Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt in mid-January as one of the 18 worst-performing trusts in England, facing an £18m deficit.

Until things began to go pear-shaped last summer, the trust had boasted six years of balancing its books and was hoping to persuade its strategic health authority to sign off a £420m PFI hospital scheme. But since July UHNS has been haemorrhaging directors almost as fast as it had been notching up cash shortages, with the departure within a six-month period of two chief executives, two finance directors and all its non-executive directors.

Former trust chair Professor Calum Paton – who admitted that the board should have asked more questions of finance chiefs as UHNS went into free-fall – has gone back to his day job... as the head of Keele University's Centre for Health Planning and Management!

A report by the trade union Unison giving a detailed chronology of the UHNS financial meltdown, calls it a "systems failure" and blames the government for introducing conflicting policies and targets – not the hapless managers who are picking up the pieces. It predicts that any new management – whether private or public – will face similar problems and limited options. Indeed, the "turnaround team" and new chief executive and chair have offered no new solutions. Their financial recovery plan reverts to the same old formula of a sixth of the trust's 7,000 staff facing the axe, with £4m in tax and national insurance payments being deferred into the next financial year. There will also be a big reduction in the size of the planned new hospital to reduce huge annual rental fees to the PFI consortium. Where have we heard that before?

ISTCS

Clinical decision

LABOUR's slow shedding of principles on the NHS continues as preparations are made for a second wave of independent sector treatment centres (ISTCs).

First the government claimed it would never touch clinical matters, and would only hand support services to the private sector under PFI. Then Health Secretary John Reid and his successor Patricia Hewitt promptly handed clinical services to the ISTCs, with the first wave of private mini-hospitals selling operations to the NHS.

Ministers claimed that the rules meant the NHS would not suffer as private sector treatment would only involve *extra* operations and not be a substitute for existing NHS resources. It was also promised that none of the staff working in the new private sector-run NHS would come from the health service. Now even these rules have been abandoned.

Staff at Southampton University Hospitals Trust have received a message from chief executive Mark Hackett outlining a new independent treatment centre which will be set up on NHS premises, with NHS staff and with NHS support.

According to Hackett's letter, a "private provider" will start in April 2007, taking work directly from the NHS as "it is projected that up to 7,500 procedures will be performed there that were previously provided by Southampton University Hospitals". The new private mini-hospital will be in the Royal South Hants Hospital, one of the city's two NHS hospitals.

As well as NHS staff servicing the clinic, "some staff will be invited to transfer to the ISTC". Hackett emphasises they will "not be forced to transfer"; but as his hospitals are already cutting jobs and closing wards to deal with a £14m financial deficit, this is no comfort.

Hackett, who left his previous job at Wolverhampton Hospital Trust with a £7m deficit, said the whole hospital site might even be given over to the private sector as "in the future it might be decided that another organisation may appropriately own the site". Staff and patients hoping for reassurance will be disappointed as "the position remains very fluid and there are no clear fixed points at this stage".

RICH PICKINGS

Trust me I'm a consultant

CONTINUING the trend among those behind the health service reforms not to stick around to see them through, but to become much richer advising the NHS on how to cope, is one Alastair Hughes, the man responsible for "patient choice" within the prime minister's delivery unit.

Although the initiative remains far from delivered, Hughes has had enough and is off to join the expanding "government services" practice of Ernst & Young, where he will be a "healthcare expert" (a term that used to suggest some medical qualification but now denotes a management consultant), explaining to health service managers what his reforms are all about.

Hughes' services won't come cheap, though. As his new boss Steve Varley, head of "advisory services" (aka consultancy) at E&Y explained to *Consulting Times* magazine recently: "I need to charge premium rates because my people need to be paid well, so I can get the best people." And who could argue that, in the man behind perhaps the most perplexing of all recent health reforms, he has one of the best? Cash-strapped NHS trusts will surely welcome him with open arms.

GP SERVICES

Local heroes

PATIENTS expressing their choice over local GP provision have won the first round in their battle to stop an American multinational from running their doctors' surgery in Derbyshire (see *Eyes passim*).

A high court judge has suspended the signing of a contract which would have handed GP services in Creswell to UnitedHealth Europe, part of the biggest US healthcare operation.

The government is determined to open primary care to the market and has been encouraging private companies to bid for GP practices. They in turn are eager to get control of the commissioning budgets that come with the practices. In Cresswell, residents and councillors were furious that their local GPs were not even on the shortlist when North East Derbyshire Primary Care Trust named United Health as its "preferred bidder".

Pam Smith, a Labour parish councillor, started legal proceedings on the grounds that the PCT had failed to consult properly before embarking on such a significant change in health provision. And Alex Nunns, of Keep Our NHS Public, said: "patients see privatization… and they don't like it."

DR FOSTER

Brent review

READERS of previous *Eyes* will recall healthcare information firm Dr Foster Ltd, which has been doing very nicely thank you by flogging NHS statistics to the NHS.

Dr Foster's "hospital activity tracker" software (which helps trusts carry out financial analysis of in-patient activity, such as length of stay) has been very popular with trusts in north-west London. First, all of the acute trusts bought it. Now all the primary care trusts have been encouraged to follow suit.

These include Brent PCT, which spent £23,000 on its activity tracker. Meanwhile Lise Llewellyn, chief executive at Brent PCT, has just left to become Dr Foster's director of strategy – although the trust insisted she wasn't directly involved in the deal.

IN THE BACK

POLICE 5

To Hull with justice

TWO YEARS after the Independent Police Complaints Commission was asked to review the death on a police station floor of black paratrooper Christopher Alder (pictured below), its report has finally been passed to the Home Secretary.

Mr Alder choked to death with his hands cuffed behind his back, and his trousers down, while five officers stood around doing nothing. After watching a disturbing 11-minute video of events on 1 April 1998 at Queens Gardens police station, Kingston upon Hull, an inquest jury decided that 37-year-old Mr Alder had been unlawfully killed. But the five officers were subsequently cleared of manslaughter and neglect of duty – and four retired before any disciplinary action.

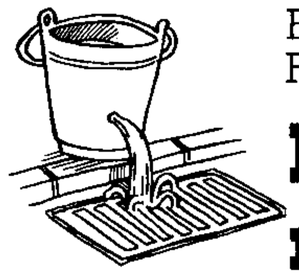
Meanwhile a civil court jury has now decided that Humberside police arrested Jason Paul – a man who had encountered Mr Alder earlier in the evening of his death – as a smoke screen to hide their own conduct in relation to his death. Mr Paul has been awarded £30,500 damages against Humberside police.

On the night in question Mr Paul had intervened to break up a fight involving Mr Alder and another man outside a Hull nightclub at Prices Dock, and had struck Mr Alder once in self defence. Mr Paul had gone voluntarily to the police after hearing of Mr Alder's death. Even though Hull officers were aware that Mr Alder had been conscious after the nightclub altercation and knew fully about the disturbing events at the Queens Gardens station later that night, they immediately arrested Mr Paul on suspicion of murder when he presented himself at the station. They later reduced the charge to causing grievous bodily harm with intent. That charge was finally dropped some months later by the Crown Prosecution Service.

Last month a jury at Sheffield county court accepted Mr Paul's claim that the aim of the criminal charges – and the publicity which ensued – was to deflect potential criticism over Mr Alder's death away from the police. The jury had heard how the officer in charge of the investigation into Mr Paul was also the duty inspector who had been called to Queens Gardens on the night. And they were shown a confidential note from another police officer which urged that magistrates at the committal stage should not be told that the Police Complaints Authority was investigating the case as a death in custody.

Mr Paul's solicitor Chez Cotton, of Hickman and Rose, said: "It has taken eight years for Mr Paul's name to be publicly cleared. In light of the significant jury findings and the continued failure of Humberside police to apologise, we have asked for the Independent Police Complaints Commission to urgently consider what disciplinary action should be taken."

Both the Alder family and Jason Paul hope that that the closing of ranks immediately after the death has already been looked at as part of the review into the many failings and unanswered questions of the Alder case.



BUSINESS REGULATION

Less is moronic

THANK goodness for regulation of the country's water suppliers, as Ofwat steps in to order millions of pounds in refunds and reductions in charges for Severn Trent's hapless customers following a series of deceptions by the company.

The failures identified by the water regulator over four years from 2000 were: "the collection and submission of regulatory information in a manner that raised serious concerns"; "poor internal processes and controls which led to incorrect income data being submitted" and "deliberately miscalculated bad debt data". The company's crucial "leakage" calculations, meanwhile, have been referred to the Serious Fraud Office.

The man presiding over this sorry mess was Sir David Arculus, recently knighted for services to industry and chairman of Severn Trent over the offending period. But it is to such characters that the government turns to determine its policies towards business, and Sir David duly got his call in 2002 when he became chairman of the chancellor's Better Regulation Taskforce.

His efforts culminated in an influential report for the government last year called *"Regulation – less is more"*. Endorsing industry lobbyists' outlandish claims about the costs of "red tape" and largely ignoring the public benefits of decent controls, Arculus recommended a crude "one in, one out" approach to regulation and a deregulation bill under which laws proving inconvenient to business could be repealed without the trouble of parliamentary scrutiny. Both are now being faithfully implemented.

Since leaving his government job Sir David has been suitably rewarded for his efforts on business's behalf with a directorship at *Financial Times* owner Pearson and the presidency of the CBI – influential positions from which to demand yet more deregulation. His calls might be just slightly undermined, however, if anybody dares point out that it's running businesses like he did that makes regulation necessary in the first place.

NUCLEAR WASTE

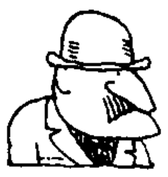
Leak soup

BRITISH Nuclear Fuels Ltd is one of the few UK firms seriously bidding for the massive nuclear clean-up contracts from the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority.

The plan is that the government-owned firm should sell off the British Nuclear Group, its Sellafield operating arm. This firm will then compete with the big US engineers queuing up for the billion-pound contracts dealing with Britain's "legacy" of nuclear waste. While BNFL has some advantages – the government will not want to hand every bit of this strategic work to foreign firms – it does still insist on shooting itself in the foot.

With the first contracts about to be announced, BNFL has discovered yet another leak. This time a blocked pipe in Sellafield's "highly active liquor evaporation and storage" plant, home to a radioactive soup brewed in the 1950s, caused "high levels of radiation" in a workspace prompting an evacuation.

The leak occurred in December but was only publicised by the Health & Safety Executive, which is considering "enforcement action", in February. Luckily for BNFL their leak was overshadowed by a more serious atomic incident involving AEA Technology which was revealed at the same time. Consequently BNFL's latest embarrassment got no national press attention. Until now.



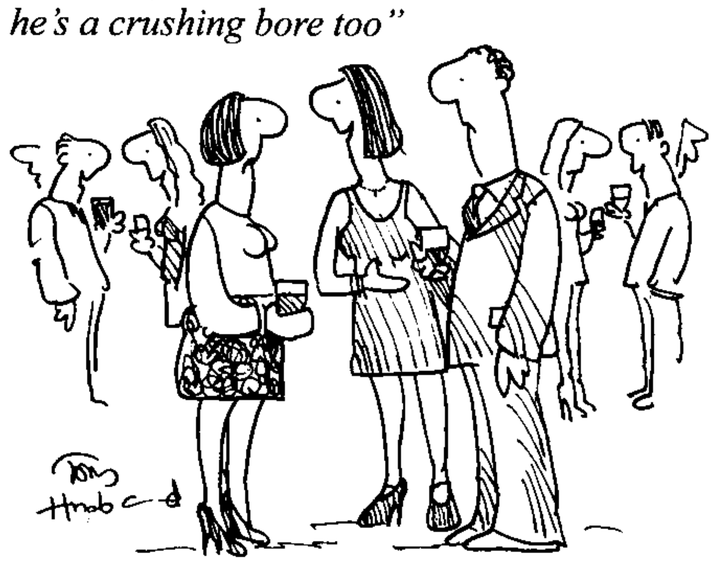
In the City

Mills and Bung Special

"THE dead man did it". This familiar cry has often echoed from the witness box by defendants facing clear evidence of guilt. And often the missing man tactic works. Juries are understandably influenced by the clear criminality of the man who isn't there, blamed by his willing accomplices who are. The Maxwell trial was a classic example.

David Mills, it seems, may have played the dead man card in a desperate bid to extricate himself from a serious problem with the Inland Revenue by admitting to an apparent bribe only to later create a much bigger problem with Italian investigating magistrates who, taking him at his word, want to charge him with corruption.

"Monica, this is Alan – he's a crushing bore too"



That appears to be perhaps the most persuasive reason for Mills' bizarre actions and is nonetheless credible because it is also the explanation now seized upon by the man who denies "bunging" him £350,000 for not telling "all I knew" – beleaguered Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi.

For what is certain – and there is much in the Mills story which is anything but – is that the thousands of pages now being studied by the Milan judge who will decide whether Mills and his one-time biggest client go to trial contain no Berlusconi finger prints. Nor do the fingerprints of the dead man – Carlo Bernasconi, key player with Mills in the offshore Fininvest archipelago – appear.

Indeed, the only evidence of either "Mr B" being involved in the £350,000 "gift" comes from Mills himself – in his confession to his accountants, Rawlinson & Hunter, confirmed to the Italian magistrates months later in 2004. Mills has since denied any bribe and retracted his statements incriminating Berlusconi for arranging the gift in gratitude for "turning some very tricky corners to put it mildly" when giving evidence in the late 1990s against his client.

So why did Mills initially point the finger at the "B people"? The evidence suggests that having received £350,000 in 1999 and not declared it to the taxman, Mills was spooked when, in January 2004, the Revenue queried his 2002 tax return regarding the source of bank interest. Fearing the taxman was on to the undeclared payment and could prosecute, he volunteered as proof of a hopefully non-taxable "gift" a dead benefactor! Bernasconi had conveniently died in 2001.

Mills' accountants reported his version (minus the bribe element) to the Revenue. The gift was always taxable. But the Revenue did a sweetheart deal for the Labour minister's husband: no prosecution; just the tax plus modest penalties plus interest. In the view of tax experts, Mills should have been prosecuted as a lawyer, tax adviser and two-time loser. As explained on page 3, professionals are not normally let off – especially for a repeat offence; and Mills had already made a previous £1m settlement in 1996 after volunteering the previous non-disclosure of a £4m Berlusconi pay-off.

Furthermore he had failed not only to disclose the "gift" but also the profits on the hedge fund investments he made with it. But a decision to prosecute would have had to come from people at the top of the Revenue who would then have needed to explain that decision to their boss, Gordon Brown. Much easier to do a deal and hope nobody found out.

Mills of course would have assumed that Berlusconi and the magistrates would also never find out. So imagine his panic months later when confronted with the confession he had made to Rawlinson & Hunter, who had passed his document on to not just the National Criminal Intelligence Service (who passed it to the Revenue) but also to the Serious Farce Office which was assisting the Italian investigations. Mills had little choice but to confirm the version he had given his accountants and admit to a suspected bribe from "Mr B" and friends.

But once away from Milan Mills must have realized that there was no paper trail leading back to either of the Mr Bs as far as the £350,000 was involved. But there were paper trails of payments and investments through the same British Virgin Islands company, Struie Holdings, and its Swiss bank account leading back to other Italian clients who could have been credible sources of the payment – the Marcucci family, Flavio Briatore and in particular ship-owner Diego Attanasio for whom Mills had also gone far more than the extra kilometre to fend off magistrates from Salerno investigating Attanasio for corruption.

So suddenly in November last year Mills retracted his confessions incriminating "Mr B" and declared Attanasio was his benefactor. He had obviously not cleared this with the ship-owner who denied all knowledge claiming he was in jail at the time!

Mills' fate could depend on whether the judge in Milan can determine whether he was lying then or lying now about the money and what he did for it. But even if Mills escapes prosecution, his legal future could be all behind him. Which explains why he was looking (without success) to start again in Dubai by dropping the Dear Leader's name. The Law Society will perhaps also be interested in his business methods.

The thousands of documents illustrate how Mills appears to have regularly intermingled clients and his own personal affairs when it came to investments. Sometimes he invested with his clients, other times he acquired investments from them. Although there was no dishonesty, unless proper records were kept and authorization always obtained, this could be a problem.

This complex co-mingling explains the confusion over whether Mills was the beneficial owner of the Old Monk pub chain shares sold for £147,000 in 1999. Struie Holdings, which nominally held the shares, received money belonging to Briatore, who claimed at one stage to own the Old Monk shares, and Attanasio.

CIM, the Geneva bank where Struie had its account, was told the beneficiary was Marina Mahler – a British citizen living in Monte Carlo. She, however, appeared to pass at least control of the shares to Mills. But other documents suggest that the owner was a Briatore trust run from Vaduz!

Substantial payments of more than £100,000 were made to Mahler. Some of which were paid back to Mills' personal account. Just what role Mahler played is still unclear.

David Mills' problems stem in many ways from his renowned intellectual arrogance and an approach which saw him hide behind the excuse that he was only ever advising clients or acting on their instructions. The fact that this regularly seemed to involve evading Italian taxes never seemed to concern him. When asked, he would insist he had done nothing wrong. But documents make clear how the offshore trusts and companies established and run by Mills soothed the fears of his Italian clients.

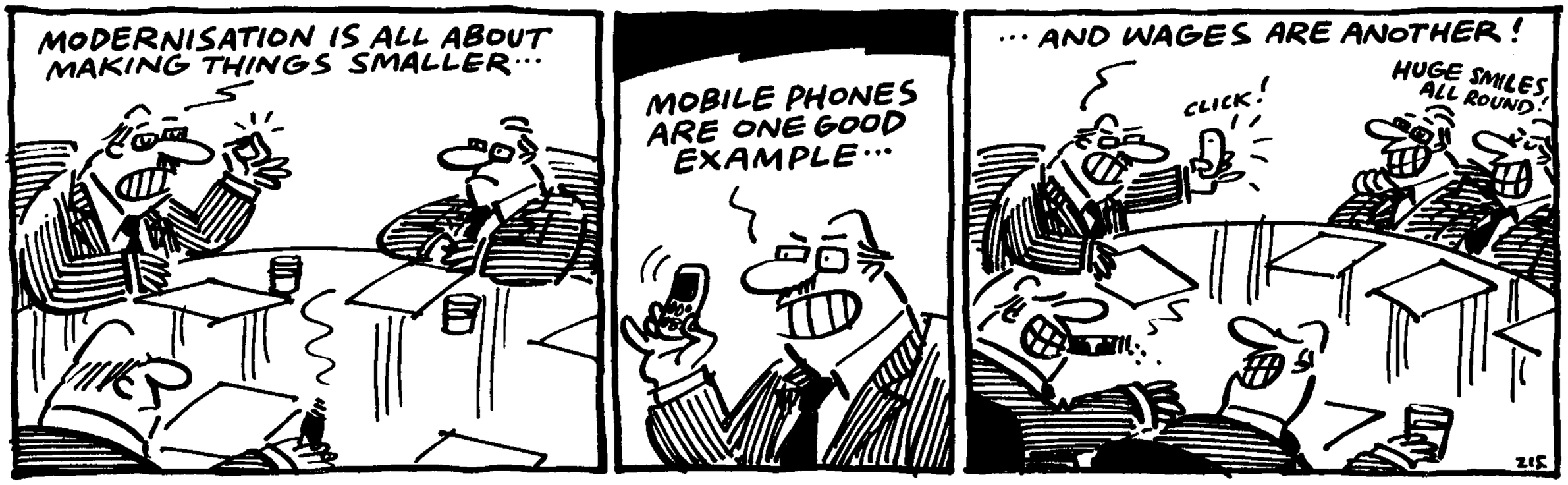
Mills appeared to share their view about not paying tax if at all possible. He hid the £4m pay-off from Berlusconi for disguising ownership of TV stations in Italy and Spain from not just the Revenue but also his lawyer partners at Mackenzie Mills. Only the threat of legal action from one partner forced him to grudgingly hand over their share.

He belatedly admitted to owning the £4m, which resulted in a corporation and income tax bill exceeding £1m. The settlement was negotiated for Mills with the Revenue by Edsaco, the company to whom Mills had sold his CMM Corporate Services business for £750,000 in 1994, in return for an around £1m success fee. As part of that deal Edsaco (now Chiltern Group) did both Mills and Tessa Jowell's tax returns from 1996 to 2000.

When Mills sold his company management business CMM, he gave an assurance that the clients were all top drawer and would create no problems. He gave a similar assurance to Rawlinson & Hunter in 1996 after they agreed to take the Berlusconi files when Edsaco told him to take them away after the SFO arrived looking for CMM files on Berlusconi. Subsequently Chiltern was required to provide information on several other CMM clients.

Mills was questioned as a witness in 1999 in an investigation by magistrates in Trento into the

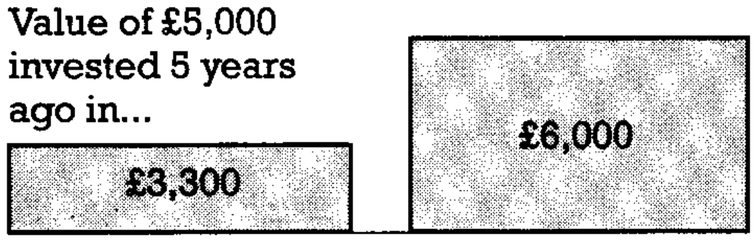
THE DIRECTORS DREDGE & RIGG



Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

ISA season special: Sunday Times fund management "find" Jayesh Manek



shipment of HIV-infected blood products to Italy, which was linked to a CMM-managed offshore company run for the Marcuccis. The proposed charges were dropped and the Marcuccis exonerated.

It emerged in 1997 that Mills had also been questioned by magistrates in Rome as a witness about an £18m fraud involving three Italian-insured hydrofoils which were sent to the Caribbean but then disappeared. Mills was a director of the company at the centre of the deal. He was also a director of a company embroiled in an investigation into possibly Mafia-linked toxic waste dumping being investigated in Palermo. Mills was not accused of any wrongdoing in these cases and was not personally involved in the deals under investigation.

Mills again featured in the tax evasion trial of former Dutch soccer stars Ruud Gullit, Marco Van Basten and Frank Rijkaard, who had all played for Berlusconi's AC Milan. They were convicted of multi-million tax evasion involving offshore companies advised by Mills.

Mills played a facilitating role in a £300m arms deal to supply Pakistan with tanks from Ukraine in 1996 where there were allegations of substantial commissions being paid to offshore companies.

Controversial clients were not the only reason Chiltern was unhappy with Mills. It discovered he controlled a rival trust company in Guernsey which did business for Berlusconi. This included trusts for Berlusconi's son and daughter, and companies which owned a yacht and a Bermuda mansion.

Any one of these clients or inquiries, plus the use of not one but two Swiss bank accounts (for personal and/or client affairs) and assorted offshore companies hardly represent Labour values or are helpful to a Labour minister. Combined, it is off the Downing Street wall.

But while enjoying the fruits of Mills' growing six-figure income and profits from selling CMM and his trust company, Tessa Jowell – despite sharing the same accountant, Sue Mullins, late of Chiltern – never appeared to question the activities that provided their enviable lifestyle; a lifestyle well beyond that of a humble backbench MP or even a minister. But even after the SFO raids in 1996 or Mills' subsequent frequent trips to meet the Italian magistrates? Even when he began to cozy up to Iran some three years ago realizing that he was a busted flush in Italy and blatantly used the ministerial relationship to tap Foreign Office Minister Liz Symons for information?

Only now it seems – after more than 20 years of the benefits – is Tessa Jowell shocked to discover her husband's activities. So shocked that they have separated. The American legal concept of willful blindness might occur to the less charitable.

But why should Jowell be concerned when her idols Tony and Cherie have been only too happy to accept the hospitality and gifts of David Mills' best client, Silvio Berlusconi, who has already had convictions for corruption, false accounting and illegal party financing overturned on appeal or because the trials and the offences were time barred!

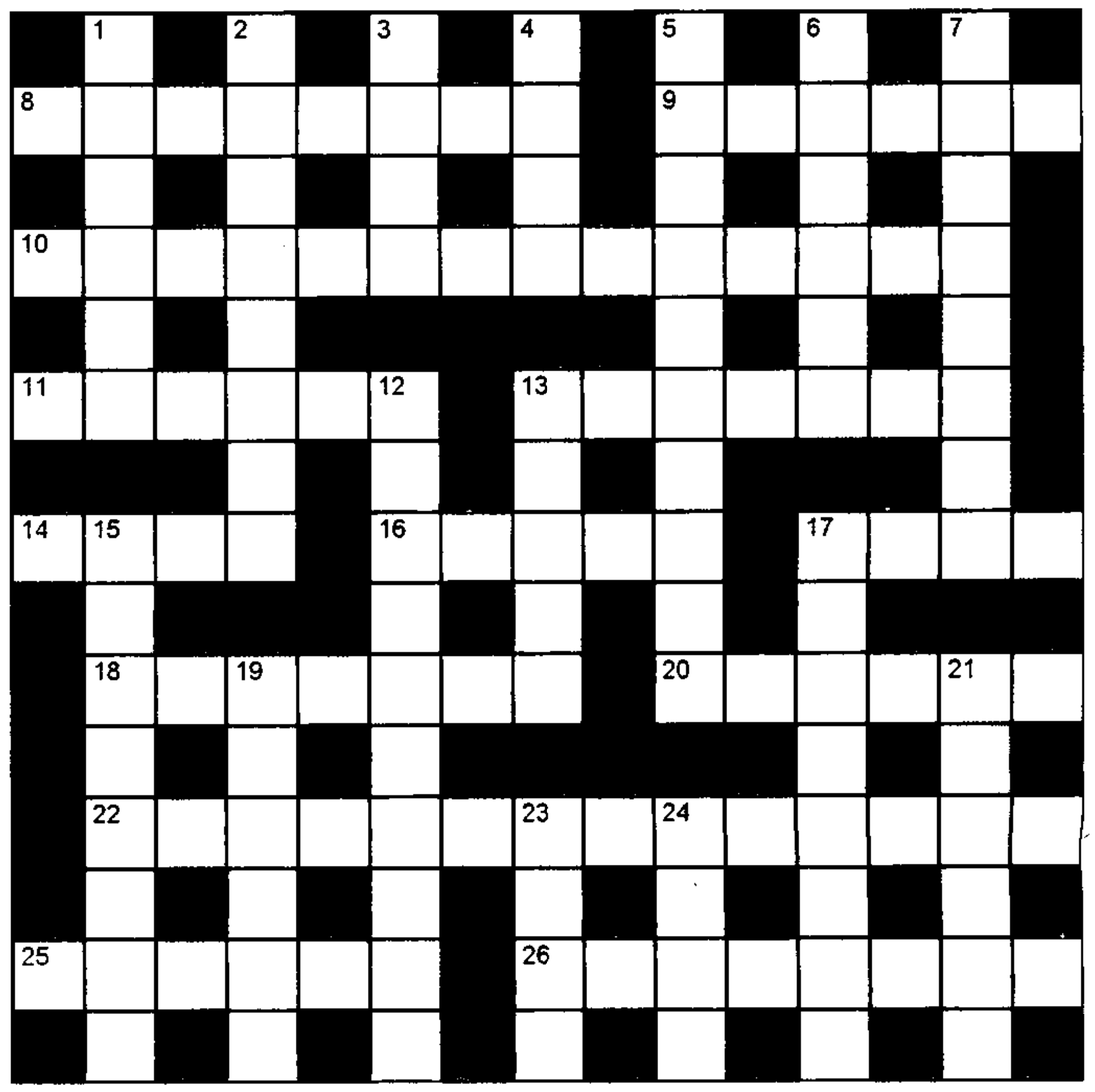
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 309

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 24 March 2006

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

8 Defender of a nasty video one put out about "pussy" (8)

9 "Getting a hard-on right" row leads to pandemonium (6)

10/7dn./16 Religiously staying in tune with the party line? (7,4,3,4,4,5)

11 On a trip, Stephen was so done in (6)

13 Bob screwed by heartless Tory curse (7)

14 Tart from US city, getting end away, rejected (4)

16 See 10ac.

17 See 3dn.

18 Mel's involved with Tony's ultimate web site undergoing seemingly endless reconstruction (7)

20 Eff-off when collared by Olympic Games campaigner – Columbian? (6)

22 Like the typical bombastic politician wants every known beer plus roll (3,4,3,4)

25 Darwin's transport for the heavy smoker? (6)

26 Like scattering shit on floor (8)

DOWN

1 Feat hiding double-D with one fan! (6)

2 Yobbo standing on testicle presents a real problem (5,3)

3+17ac. Shoot up in Milan, possibly taking an E (8)

4 Will the pretentious columnist take heroine from the rack? (4)

5 No other sort of sex makes car steamy? (10)

6 Roman backstabber needs to be in a state of sexual excitement in number 10, possibly (6)

7 See 10ac.

12 Following her ex-daughter-in-law's allegation, Brenda in denial (10)

13 Inside city limits act like one with a chopper that's soft and sticky (5)

15 Parliamentarian malarky settled when we replaced Tony finally (8)

17 Didn't put away all the chicken Labour traditionalists Tony distances himself from? (4,4)

19 Married and put in order? Rubbish! (6)

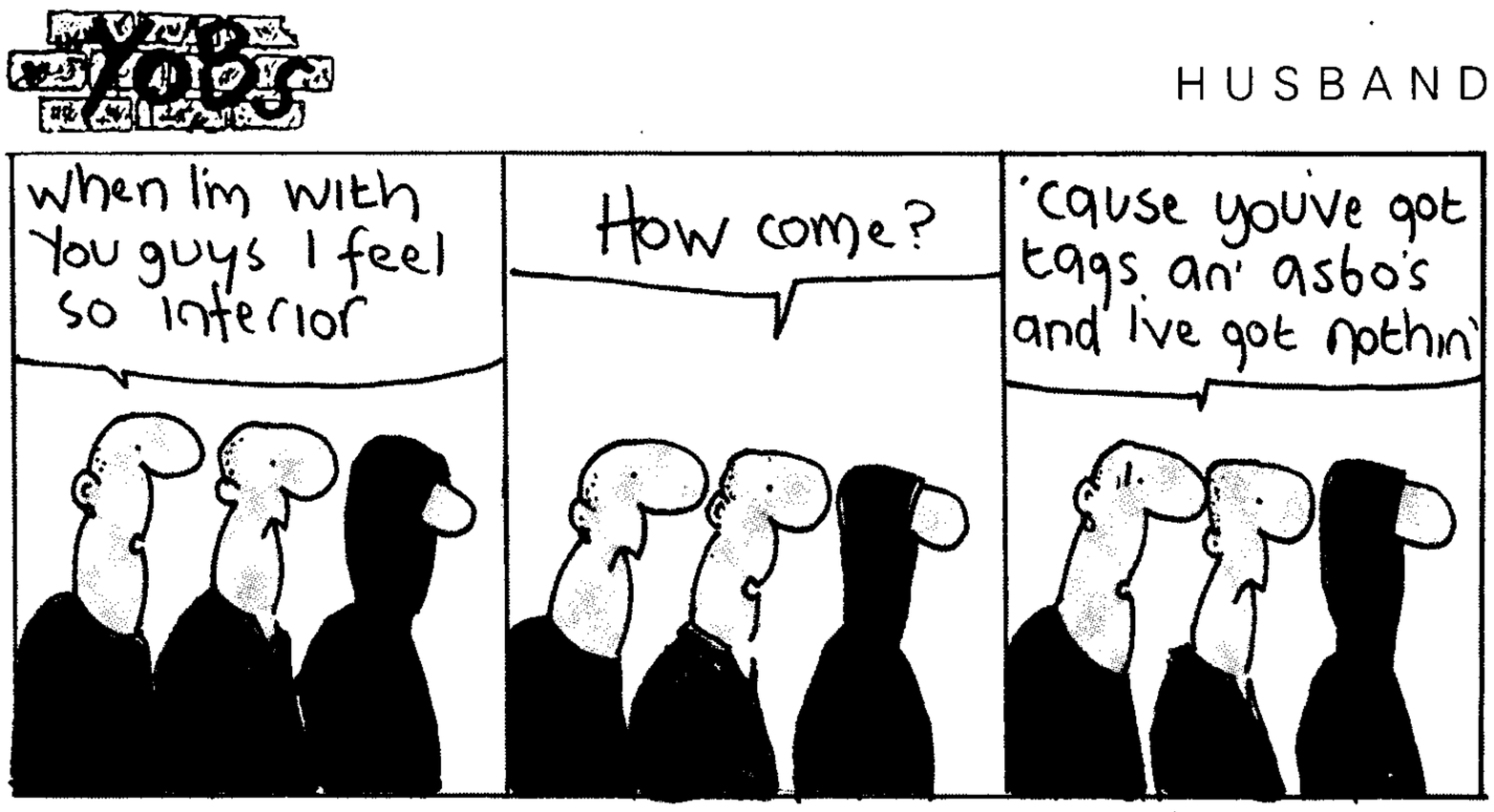
21 Bevin's grave is lacking one (6)

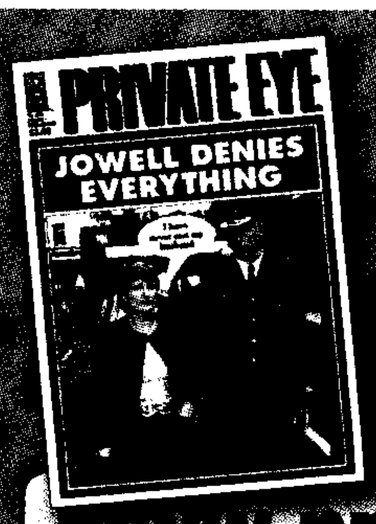
23+24 Decline podium occupied by flipping Brown (8)

Crossword 308 winner: PETER RICE

ACROSS: 1/8 Projectile vomiting 7/30 Give head 9 T'ai chi 10 Beer pump 11 Amis 12 Kabul 14/22 Kate Moss 15/20 Ring pull 16 Abating 19 Arapaho 24 Trump 25 Iffy 27 Bosom pal 29 Ragbag 31 Pussyfoots.

DOWN: 2 Realm 3 Jockstrap 4 Chickenshit 5 Imbibe 7 Gopak 13 Labour Party 17 Talking-to 18 Creosote 21 Qualms 23 Sword 26 Feast 28/6 Popeye.





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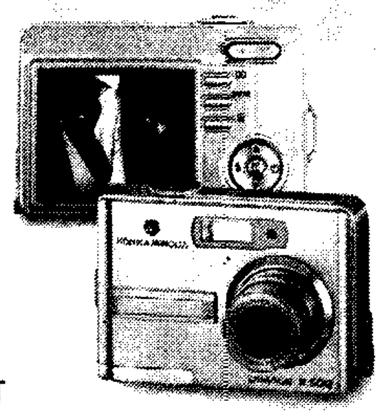

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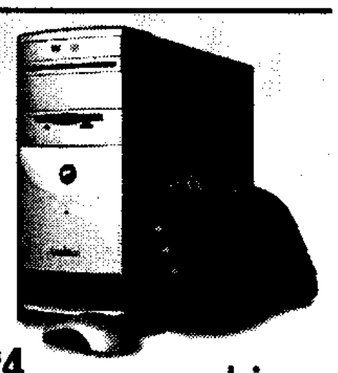

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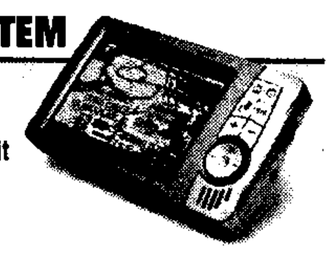

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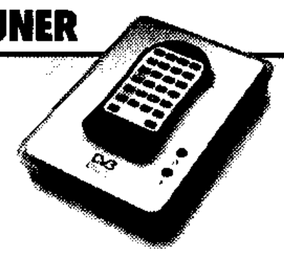

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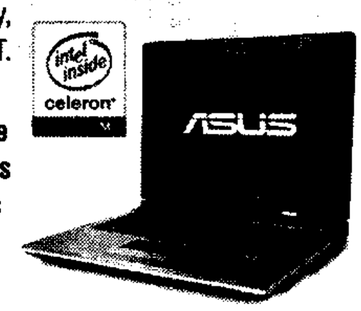

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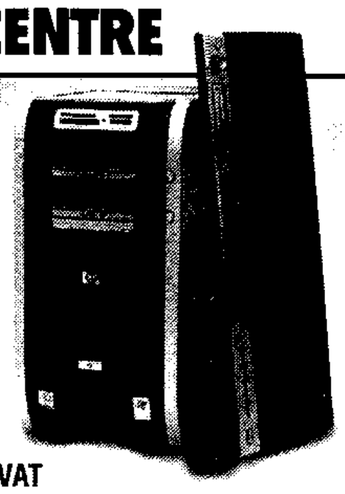

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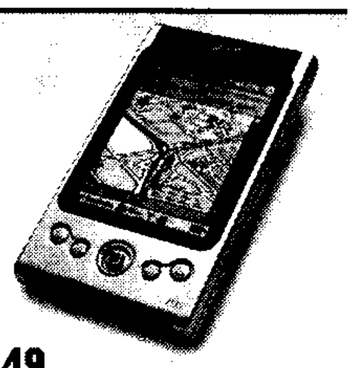

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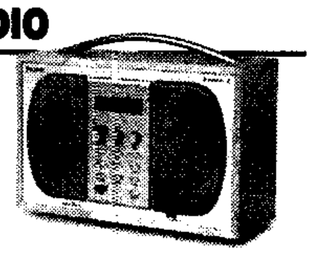

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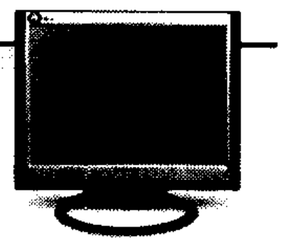

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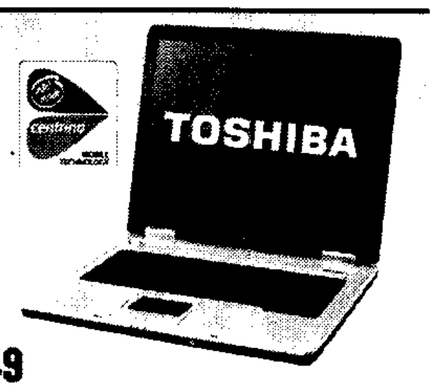

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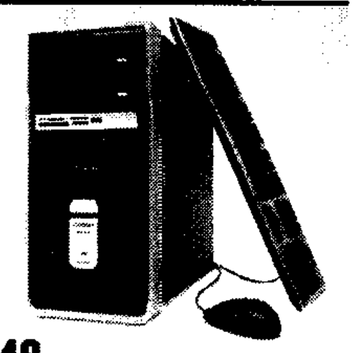

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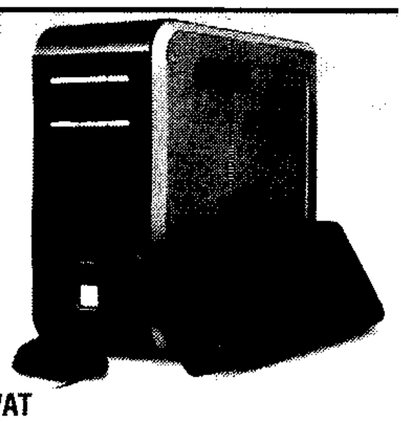

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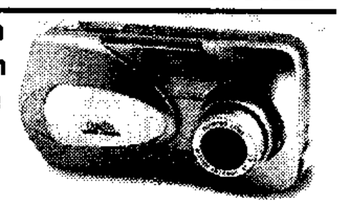

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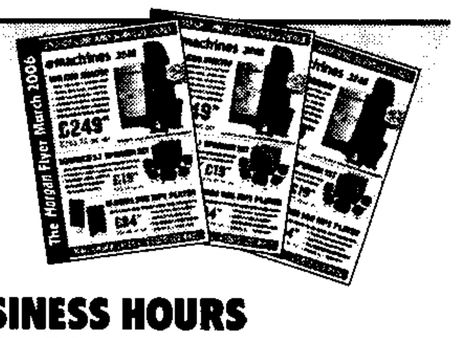

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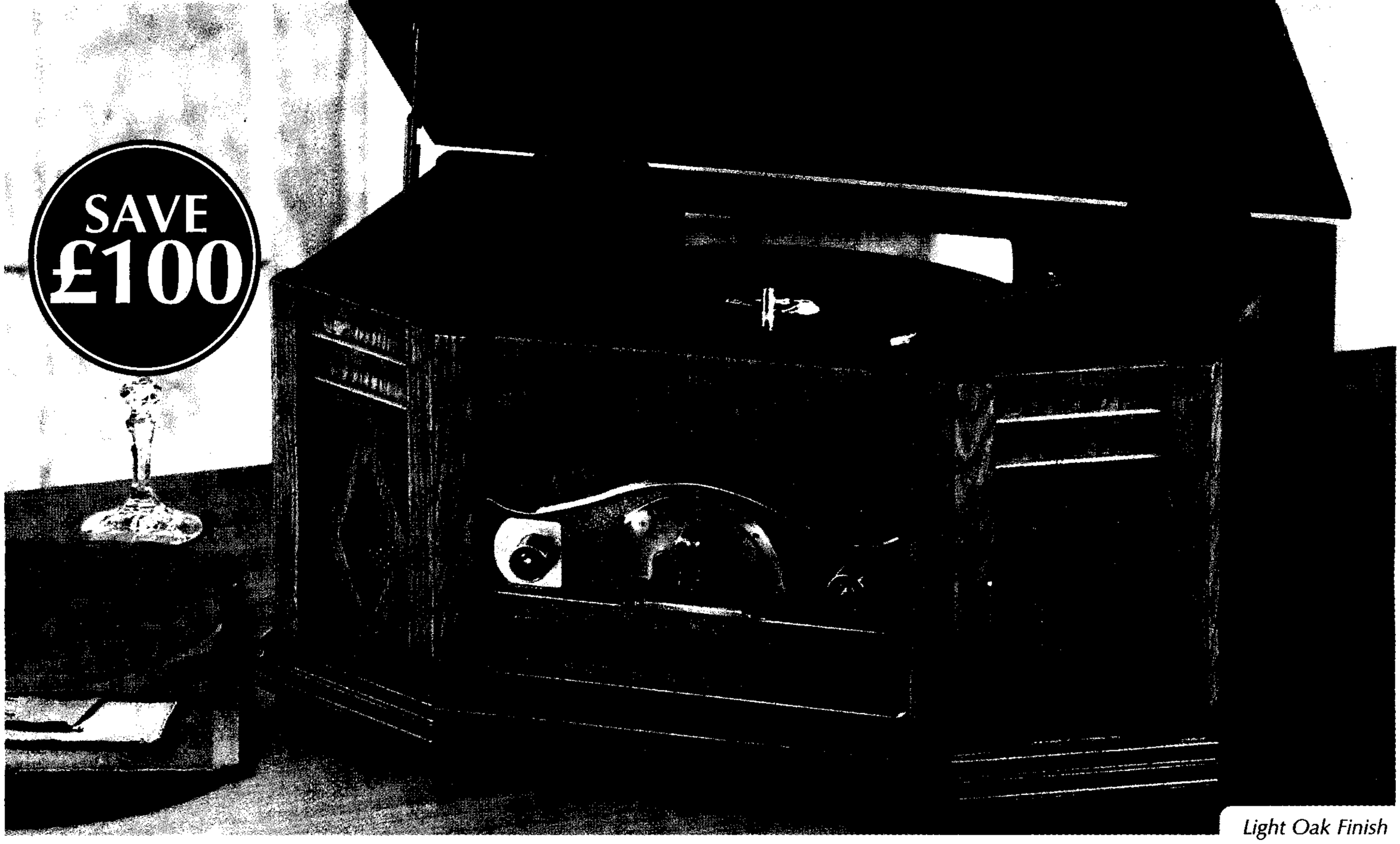

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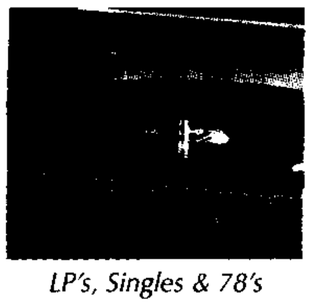

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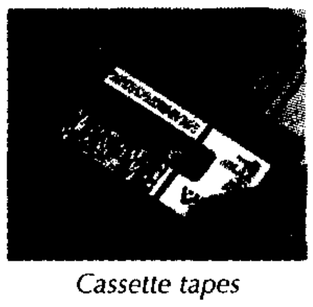

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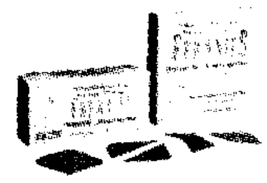

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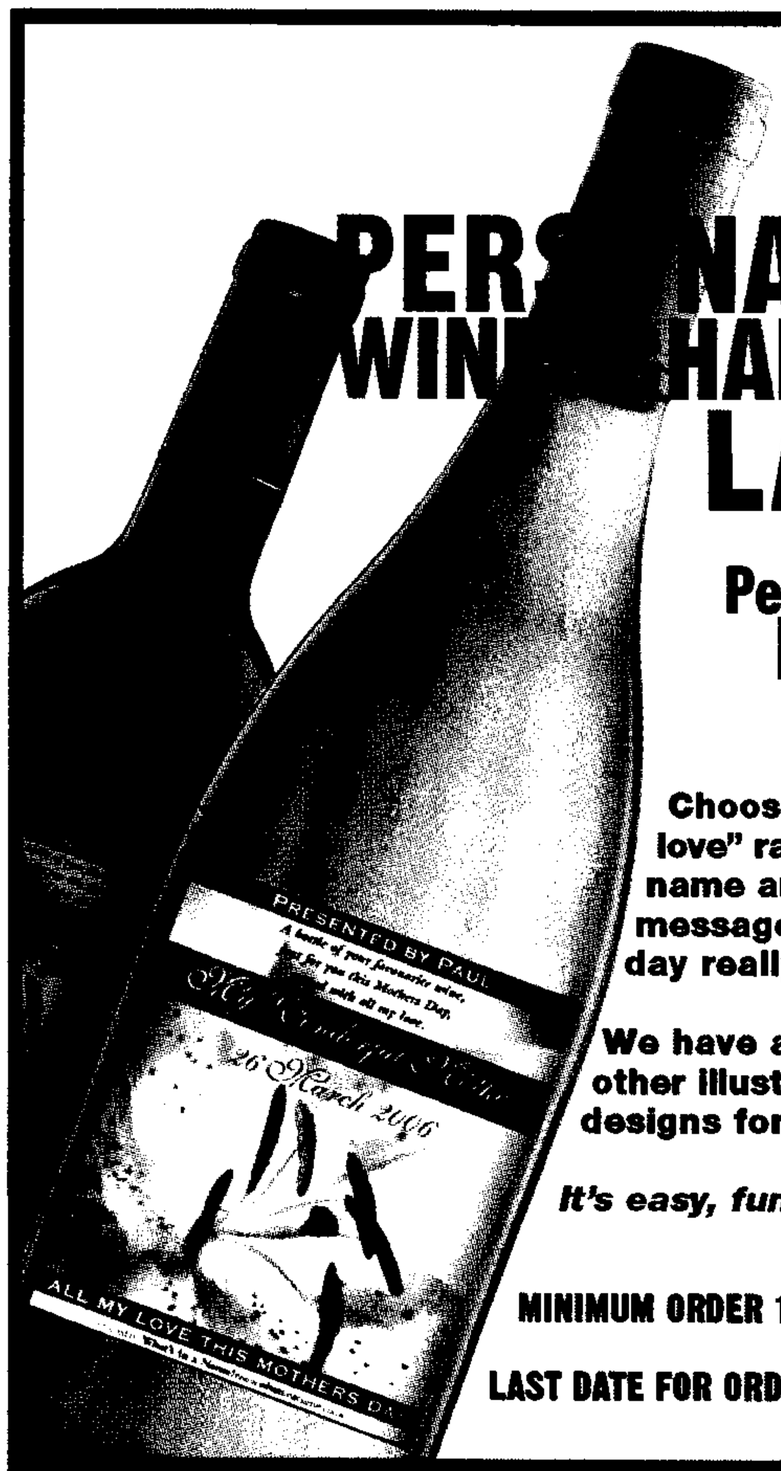

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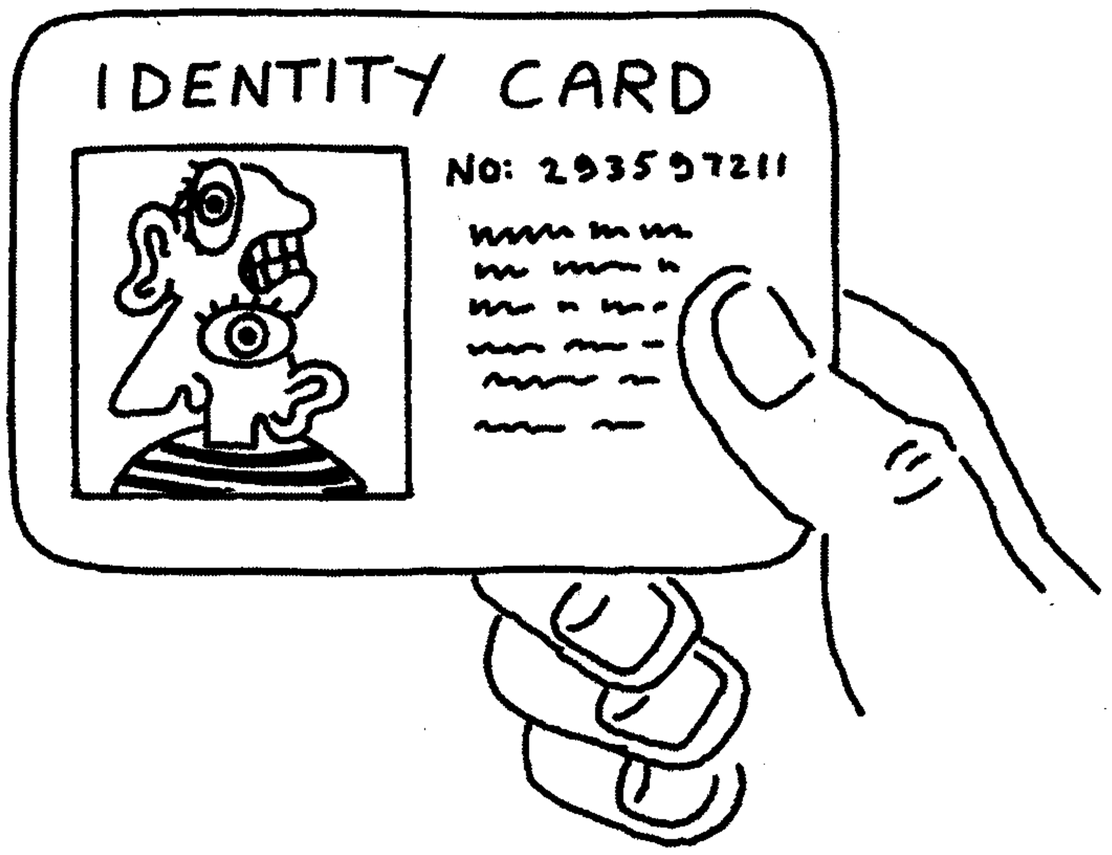

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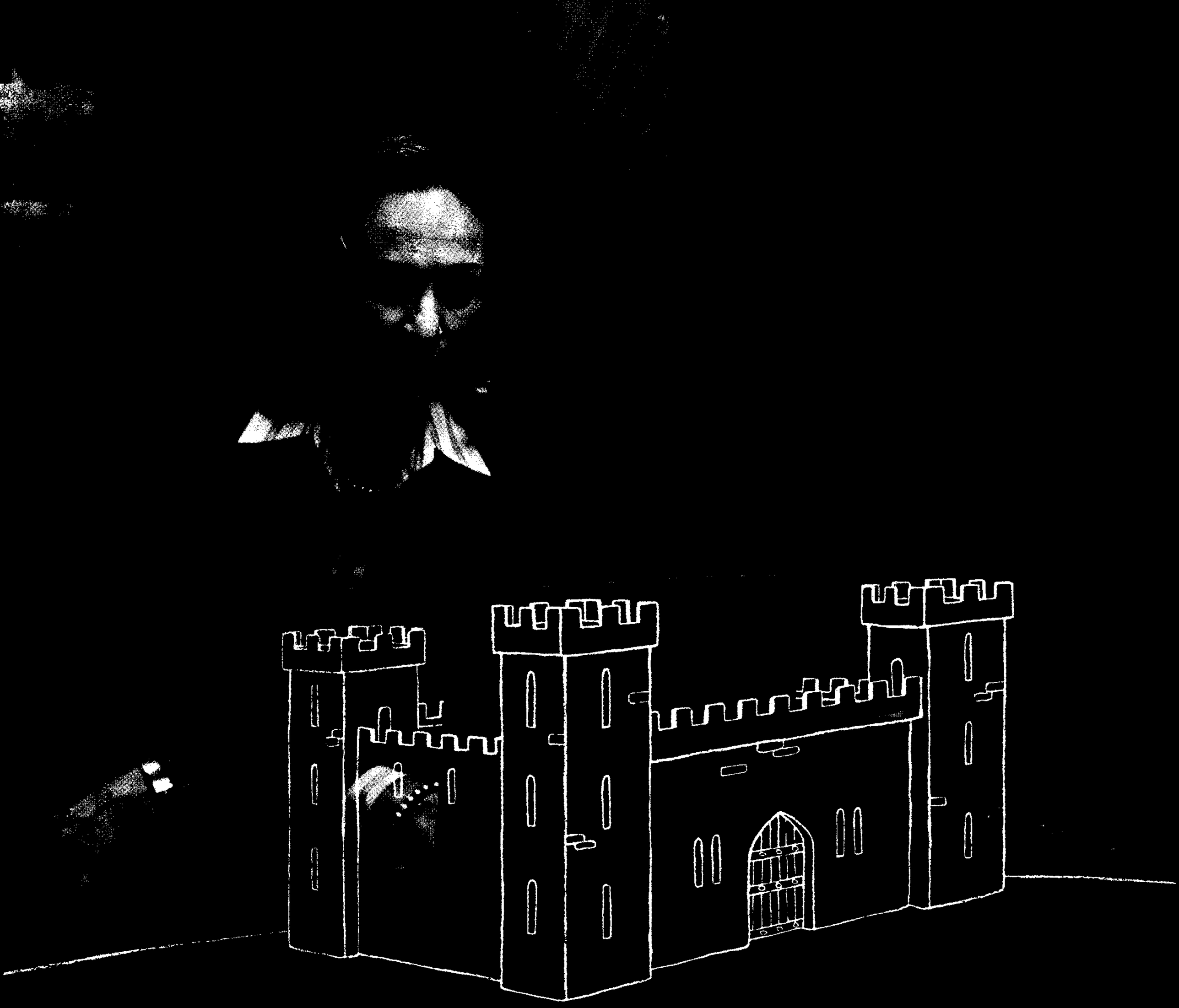

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